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Breaking the Ink – Abstract Ink Art in Mainland China

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Martin Slobodník

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The writing of this book took more time than I expected. During this process, I also received much support from Slovak and Czech academics, which influenced my further professional growth. Special thanks go to Professor Marián Gálik, the founder of sinology in Slovakia. He accompanied me throughout my Chinese studies and introduced me to methodical work. I have greatly benefited from his encouragement, and this support and his

lifelong work and tenacity urged me on. Numerous other people assisted me while I was undertaking this research.

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Author's Note

The Chinese language has certain specificities, one of which is Chinese characters. There is a purpose in using them only when necessary. The names of all Chinese artists or art critics mentioned here can be found in the index. The dates of birth and death of artists who are mentioned only briefly are given on their first occurrence. In the case of artists who are discussed here in more detail, their dates of birth or death and their names in Chinese characters appear in the passage where the author takes a closer look at them. The names of the movements and exhibitions are translated into English, and Chinese characters are in the footnotes. Sometimes the English names of the exhibitions given by the organisers vary from the original in Chinese, and the same applies to the names of books. Some specific terms and techniques, especially concerning Chinese art history are written in Chinese characters directly in the text on their first occurrence. This book is based mostly on materials in Chinese. Most of the texts are translated into English without showing the Chinese original, with a few exceptions, such as a theoretical text of great importance written by famous Chinese artists, or a controversial text by one artist mentioned here, who exhibited non-representational paintings in France, but displayed his sceptical, even contentious attitude to abstract painting by Chinese artists. The reason is the importance or the controversial nature of the abovementioned texts.

Preface

Tradition is an artificial pool, and its borders consist of all the restrictions and the burden of rules, the shadows of ancient masters. Painters are fish swimming in the pool, but only the healthiest and strongest fish can succeed in jumping outside it.[1]

Abstract art in the strict sense has been present in mainland China only for the last few decades. Nevertheless, more and more Chinese artists are turning to abstraction at a time when abstract art is gradually losing its popularity in the global world. However, the 20th century was an epoch when China became acquainted with Western art. To some extent, we can call the 20th century in China a century of realism. In recent years, the cultural atmosphere in the country has changed, and some artists in an effort to define their unique style are trying to turn to the roots of Chinese culture. Artists encouraged by the impact of Western art trends have also uncovered abstract elements in the ancient Chinese tradition.

This book provides an introduction and overview of abstract ink art in mainland China. My work is the first comprehensive study on this subject in world art theory, and it is the result of my twenty years of research. Over the course of several years, I entertained the idea of dealing with all forms of abstract art in China, but due to the growing number of artists, it became impossible. Therefore, I decided to focus all my attention exclusively on abstract ink art.

Many Chinese artists contributed with their assistance in the completion of this project. During my studies at Peking University in 1991-1992, I met with Fan Shuru (b. 1960), a teacher of Chinese art and member of the ’85 New Wave avant-garde movement. While I was interested in aspects of modern Chinese art in general, Shuru’s attention was concentrated on the power of Chinese ink painting. He was the one who introduced me to

[1] Jia Youfu (b. 1942), Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), Beijing, during the author‘s studies of Chinese ink painting in 1992-93, often used the above sentence to describe the relations between an artist‘s creation and tradition.

this technique and aroused my interest. Subsequently, I decided to continue my studies with a focus on Chinese painting, and in 1992 I joined the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing. I had the opportunity to do a considerable amount of fieldwork during my stay. That gave me the chance to gain rich data and to build up long-lasting friendships with young modern artists. Advances in modern technology have allowed me to connect with many other artists from the periphery of China, for example Liu Yiyuan, who comes from Hubei province and with whom I have been in contact since the late 90s.

After the defence of my dissertation entitled "The Process of Development of Abstract Painting in Mainland China" at Charles University in Prague at the Institute of East Asian Studies in 2002, I returned to CAFA to continue in my research. I also started to paint, and I adapted to the Chinese art community. I began to sense the changing cultural and social atmosphere in art circles and throughout society. During my first study stay at Peking University and CAFA, I infiltrated two underground art communities concentrated in Yuanmingyuan and in the suburbs of northern Beijing, which operated semi-illegally. In the early years of the 21st century, I visited many times the studios of artists in the famous 798 Art Zone in Beijing. Over the years, this area has been transformed from an underground community of artists living in abandoned military production halls, which often faced demolition, into a large art district with numerous renowned galleries.

Influential communities of artists are also located in Shanghai and Hangzhou, which became the two main centres of abstract art in China. New art districts with many galleries are emerging in these cities. In addition, Shanghai has earned a reputation as the capital of abstract art. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the popularity of abstract art has been on the rise. Many artists are joining the movement, gaining the respect of the international artistic community.

My initial aim was to analyse and compare artists from mainland China by a categorisation based on the use of calligraphic brush strokes. I also tried to identify other factors of division, such as membership of various art movements or participation in exhibitions. However, these divisions are confusing and inaccurate. Whilst some artists often participated in various collective exhibitions, others rarely participated in such events. Therefore, the factor of exhibitions is not necessarily an indicator of the quality of an artwork.

On the contrary, exhibitions were a catalyst for the appearance of artists who devoted themselves to abstraction only for a short time and then returned to traditional art. To understand this process, I have included such artists in this book. Some well-known artists considered participation in these experimental exhibitions of contemporary art just as a new creative experiment for a limited time.

In the 1990s, the discussion of calligraphic brush strokes was critical, unlike today, when its use seems insignificant and irrelevant even in Chinese art discourse. In this study, I deal extensively with this dilemma in order to explain the cultural atmosphere and characteristics of Chinese art society from the late 80s to the present day. In addition, I analyse the significant changes in Chinese artistic circles towards abstract painting and the new position of ink painting in Chinese culture, which has been the bearer of Chinese national identity since ancient times.

As was expected, there are no major differences between the works of artists living in China and returnees; there has been no critical shift in the quality of the artworks. Leaving the country has led some artists to gain a better appreciation of the value of the Chinese tradition. Their adherence to tradition under the influence of Western art caused a gradual change in their artistic style.

Gu Wenda and his artwork, artist´s studio, New York, 1991

The works of art reproduced in this book are mostly provided directly by their artists, curators and galleries with the right of publication. However, the reproductions in Chapter I are accessible from open Internet sources. Lack of resources limited the number of illustrations in Chapter II, which includes artworks by artists from mainland China and omits the works of the listed artists from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Japanese art became part of this book later. Fruitful discussions with many artists who were inspired by Japanese avant-garde calligraphy gave me an incentive to include this art trend in my research as well.

The purpose of this study is not to assess and evaluate the artistic qualities. Instead, my attention was focused on their overall contribution to contemporary Chinese art. I categorise the impulses that caused the turn to abstraction for many artists. I also determine social changes and cultural perceptions in Chinese society, which has become more open and has gradually begun to accept the concept of pure abstraction. Although the art market for abstract art is much more extensive than a few decades ago, the financial income from the sale is insufficient for the survival of abstract artists on the Chinese market. While Chinese society and art collectors strongly prefer traditional ink paintings, Western gallerists and sympathisers of contemporary Chinese art focus on other styles, most notably Political Pop or Cynical realism. Therefore, economic survival is one of the main reasons why Chinese painters neglect pure abstraction or maintain several very different styles in their work. These and many other obstacles that artists are currently struggling with are causing a loss of inspiration and motivation for their further work. For some of them, it may even culminate in the rejection of abstract art.

Moreover, in this book I also mention the social attitudes of abstract artists towards the Chinese tradition, philosophy and history which influence their work. I interpret their personal statements, which I have gathered during our many years of discussion. Artists have expressed their own philosophical and aesthetic views, and state the various factors that shaped their relationship to abstraction. Whilst some of them present themselves as followers or reformers of traditional ink painting, others consider themselves as members of the contemporary global art scene without any ties to Chinese history.

Specific features and problems that I have identified in my research suggest that abstract ink art occupies a unique position in Chinese art. The importance of the abstract trend is expressed not only in the intentions of

the potential contribution to Chinese ink painting but also in the incorporation of Western art trends into Chinese art, as well as the integration of Chinese art in the international art scene. My research confirmed that Chinese abstract ink art has strengthened the position and presence of Chinese art on the world art scene.

I hope that this book, which is the first of its kind, presents modern Chinese abstract ink art in all its variations and will serve as a general overview of major Chinese artists and explain the whole process of the development of abstraction in China.

Author with Gu Wenda in his studio, Shanghai, 8 September 2019

Introduction. Is it Possible to Speak of Abstract Art in China?

Contemporary art in China is defined by different elements. Due to the significant differences in art history between the West and the East which were caused by historical events, such as the political situation, modern art in China developed in its own way. At the end of the 1970s, some Chinese artists were aware of the problems which had surfaced in contemporary art around the world. They attempted to redefine Chinese art and establish their position in world art movements. Chinese artists became increasingly inspired by Modernism, Postmodernism and other movements, leading them to discover how to reflect these movements in the Chinese cultural context. Therefore, in Chinese art, new art styles and movements started appearing very quickly after 1979. Many varied art movements and styles came to China in one big explosion in the 1980s. Some of them developed into typically Chinese ones, such as Cynical realism, Kitsch art or others. At the same time, Hyperrealism was presented by the famous oil painting *Father* by Luo Zhongli (b. 1948)[2], which was warmly accepted due to its emphasis on patriotic feelings, as well as Neorealism, which emphasised traditional techniques rarely used in modern Western art. The '85 New Wave movement brought together all the avant-garde styles, such as Pop art, which has transformed in the Chinese cultural atmosphere into Political pop, but also Body art, Performance art, Earth art, Conceptual art and other styles. Altogether with other avant-garde styles, abstract art came to China. In all discussions concerning the Chinese avant-garde, there is one crucial and fascinating fact: artists creating abstract art were not only facing strong resistance mostly from conservative art critics, who attacked them for blindly following Western patterns and for lack of originality, but they were marginalised in the avant-garde movement and their works rarely appeared at the international exhibitions featuring Chinese art out-

[2] The painting *Father* by Luo Zhongli was shown at the *Second National Youth Exhibition* in December 1980. For details see Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth-century China*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1996, p. 227.

Hang Faji. *Limits of Life no. 014*, 2017, ink on paper

side of China after 1989, which were mostly focused on works somehow reflecting the socio-political situation in China.

Chinese art at the end of the 20th century used to be mostly divided into two opposing camps. While some artists, mostly those involved in ink painting, tried to follow the Chinese ink tradition and barely considered the contemporary movements which were happening in other countries around the world, others tried to reflect upon the current art movements. There was not much communication between the oil painters and those doing ink paintings, and artists involved in traditional ink painting tended to overlook any new trends happening in the art scene.

> Chinese ink painting is a marginalised art form in contemporary art; it is minimally present in international exhibitions, which are more concerned with experimental art. Despite recent surges in the market for Chinese art, ink painting is also economically less prestigious than other forms of contemporary Chinese art.[3]

[3] Elkins, James. "A New Definition of Chinese Ink Painting." *Academia.edu – Share Research*, www.academia.edu/3344609/A_New_Definition_of_Chinese_Ink_Painting, last retrieved 4 February 2020, p. 20.

Ink painting has a specific place in Chinese art. It is closely connected with Chinese tradition, and all attempts to reform it were much more complicated than in oil painting, a technique coming from the West. Chinese artists have realised the need to reform ink art. Attempts at reform have occurred in Chinese art history quite often, as Chinese painting has borne the heavy burden of all the traditional techniques. Abstract art is one of the ways to maintain some classic features without being restricted by the descriptive form, which used to define each brushstroke.

> Chinese art used to emphasise what is beyond the shape, beyond the representation. For instance, the concern with a substantially "abstract" rather than "representational" art form has had significant ramifications for East-Asian[4] art which have only begun to be understood in the West since the rise of various non-representational modes in the twentieth century.[5]

This shows that abstraction can be a way for Chinese artists to express themselves in ink, as well as to be present on the platform of contemporary art to communicate with artists around the world, without abandoning traditional techniques. Tossing away the form and entering non-representational painting is extremely difficult for artists. For political and cultural reasons, it is the most complicated time in the development of Chinese contemporary art, making abstract art in mainland China exciting to study.

Even though abstract elements have existed in a hidden form as a part of Chinese visual art for over a thousand years, in the 20th century abstraction in China was rejected for political, socio-cultural or historical reasons. In the 1980s, Chinese artists tried to re-establish the connections with the world art scene. The significant arrival of Modernism, numerous discussions about abstraction and concrete, tradition and modernity appeared in Chinese art theory. Abstraction as an art style was heavily questioned, and the realization of the aesthetic value within abstract art was mostly beyond the awareness of the community of Chinese art criticism. The opinions of art critics were mostly opposed to the concept of abstraction. For the ma-

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4 The term Oriental art has been updated to the more accurate "East-Asian art".

5 McCallum, Donald F., et al. "Donald F. McCallum, Yujiro Nakata & Alan Woodhull, The Art of Japanese Calligraphy." *PhilPapers*, January 1 1975, https://philpapers.org/rec/MCCTAO-21, last retrieved 4 February 2020.

Zhang Hao. *Space where the mind stops 2018-4*, 2018, ink on paper

jority of art critics and artists, abstract art was something coming from the West without any affiliation to Chinese art.

At the beginning of the last century, abstract art in the West developed rapidly, but in the first 80 years China was in a state of retreat and withdrawal into itself and knew nothing about the significant changes in world art over the last century. It was not until the 1980s when the country opened its doors that it discovered what was happening in the global art world. According to Xu Demin,

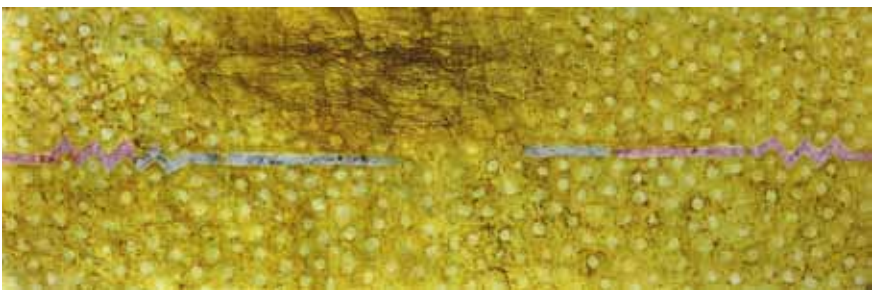
> The concept of Western 20th-century modern art had a massive impact on China at the time. The lack of understanding of abstraction in the Chinese cultural and historical context and the strong visual impact of Western abstraction at that time have caused contemporary Chinese artists to lose rational judgment as a result of the "Wave of the World abstract art". Some people have accepted the theory that abstraction is an exclusively Western concept of art, because they thought that abstract art was the result of revolutionary changes that took place in the West a hundred years ago as a result of the industrial revolution. Abstract art was born under the impact of changes in Western ideology. Therefore, the idea of abstract art comes from the West.[6]

The discussion about abstract aesthetics in Chinese art criticism raised questions in the middle of the 1980s. It began with an article in the influ-

[6] Xu Demin許德民. *Zhongguo chouxiang yishu xue*中國抽象藝術學*[Chinese Abstract Art]*. Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2009, p. 41.

ential Chinese journal *Meishu*, in which the painter Wu Guanzhong (1919-2010) was the first to mention the concept of 'beauty of form'. The intention was to protest against realism as the leading style in Chinese painting, which was characterised by traditional subjects and tools, rejecting the notion of it as the most important art style.

The art critics Hong Yiran, Liang Jiang, Yang Chengyin and others refused to accept abstract beauty for various reasons. They considered abstraction as not artistic and aesthetic. All beauty was contained in existing objects and nature, there was no such thing as pure beauty independent from the idea of the object. Refusing to accept the aesthetic theories of traditional Chinese art criticism, such as the relations "between similarity and dissimilarity" (*si yu busi* 似與不似) which could be understood as a relation between concrete and abstract in the context of art. Liu Xilin also rejected the definition of pure abstract beauty but he believed that beauty of the form could include some abstract elements. For him, the beauty of form does not exclude the concept of abstract beauty. Other contemporary art critics, such as Liu Gangji, Mao Shibo, Yang Aiqi, He Xin, Xu Shucheng, Ai Zhongxin, Li Xianting, Ma Qinzhong, Deng Fuxing, and Shu Jihao, supported the idea of the existence of abstract beauty. They proposed many different perspectives on the concept which were based on their historical analysis of traditional Chinese art.[7] Despite all these issues, Chinese abstract painting started mostly with ink painting.



Sun Baijun. *Extension of life no. 50*, 2016, ink and mineral colours on paper

[7] Huan Zhuan黃專. "80 niandai yilai, meishu lilun fazhan zongshu 80 年代以來，美術理論發展綜述 [Summary of the development of art theory since the 1980s]." *Meishu sichao*, vol. 1, no. 4,1985, p. 25.

During the development of Chinese art after political relaxation, in 1979, there have been several different movements and names used to define Chinese non-representational art. These are: "contemporary ink painting", "contemporary ink", "experimental ink painting", Experimental Ink and Wash, Abstract Calligraphy or non-calligraphy, Maximalism, Yi Pai, Neo-modernism.

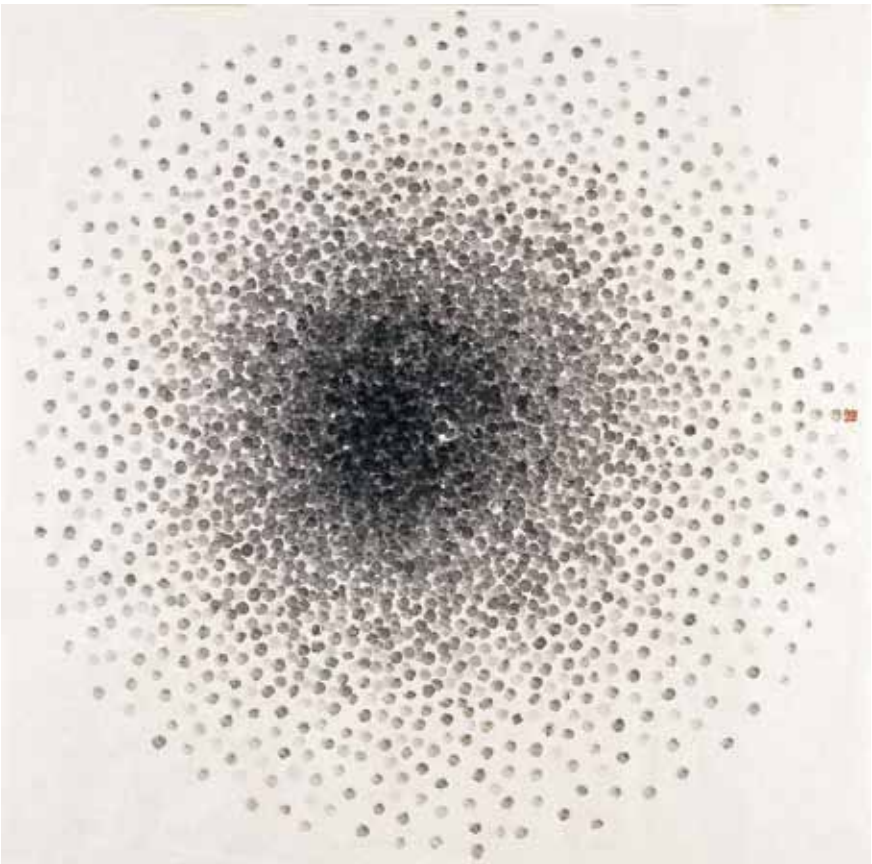
As Plato asks: 'What does painting do in each case? Does it imitate that which is as it is, or does it imitate that which appears as it appears? Is it an imitation of appearances or truth?'[8] When it comes to Chinese ink art, many questions also arise. Why in the last century did abstract painting started to appear in Chinese ink art despite the decline of abstract art in the West? And the most puzzling question of them all: if there are many artists involved in abstract painting, why are there still some people who deny the existence of abstract art in China? Chinese artists devoted to abstract ink art often use terms like "non-figurative"(*fei juxiang* 非具象) or the phrases associated with the ancient Chinese theory of art such as "beyond outward resemblance" (*xiang wai*象外) rather than "abstraction" or "abstract art". The overall attitude towards abstract art was negative. It was far less acceptable by the Communist regimes than Cynical realism, or even Political pop. The community of artists that do ink paintings tends to be more conservative than those who deal with oil painting. Ink painting in mainland China tends to be heavily reliant on academics and this is because it has a history that in Chinese art is thousands of years longer than other artistic media.

Contemporary Chinese art has attracted the attention of many scholars and curators and there are many books concerning Chinese art. Michael Sullivan, in his major publication *Art and Artists of Twentieth-century China*,[9] presents the situation of Chinese art in its whole range, including the art of Hong Kong, Taiwan and other regions. Gao Minglu focuses in his *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*[10] on the problems of Modernism in Chinese art and introduces contemporary art. Most of Wu Hong's publications are large and extensive catalogues from exhibitions, like Li Xianting, *Major Trends in the Development of*

8 Plato, and Benjamin Jowett. *The Republic*. Floating Press, 2009, p. 1202.

9 Sullivan, Michael, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-century China,* University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1996.

10 Gao, Minglu. *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*. MIT Press, 2011.



Zhang Yu. *Fingerprints series no. 1*, 1991, ink on paper

Contemporary Chinese Art, in *China's New Art, Post-1989*[11] from a huge exhibition of contemporary Chinese art which was held in Hong Kong in 1993, *Encres de Chine Expérimentales*[12] from the exhibition which was held in Lille in 2005, edited by Zhang Yu[13], Hearn, Maxwell K. *Ink Art:*

[11] TSONG-ZUNG, Chang (Intro), Li Xianting. *China's New Art, Post-1989*, Hanart T. Z. Gallery, 1993.

[12] Yu Ren郁人. *Encres de Chine Expérimentales / Zhongguo shang mo – dangdai Shiyan Shuimo Zhan*中國 上 墨 · 當代 實驗 水墨展. Pacifica – Paris, 2005.

[13] Yu Ren is the artistic pseudonym of Zhang Yu, as he admitted in interview, 21 October 2014, Shangyuan Gallery, Hangzhou.

Past as Present in Contemporary China,[14] or the latest *Manifesto of Neo-Modern Ink Art* by Xia Kejun[15].

Until now, there has been no publication about Chinese abstract ink art in English or Chinese. Zhang Yu is planning to publish his book on the movement of *Experimental Ink and Wash* which he founded. There are many publications connected with this movement, such as the series *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century,*[16] *Experimental Ink and Wash Painting of China in the 90s*[17] and the numerous publications which focus on individual authors. Zhang Yu has published many books, some of which are catalogues, such as *Zhang Yu Self-Cultivation*[18]. There are also books that explain his theoretical opinions on art, such as *Zhang Yu – The modernist End of Ink-and-Wash* by Zhu Qi[19]. The publication *Art makes me: Interview with Zhang Yu*,[20] is a compilation

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14 Hearn, Maxwell K. *Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China*. Yale University Press, 2013.

15 Xia Kejun夏可君. *Xin xiandai shuimo yishu xuanyan*新現代水墨藝術宣言 */Manifesto of Neo-modern Ink Art.* G-Dot Art Space, Hong Kong, 2018.

16 There are four volumes: Zhang Yu (Yu Ren郁人) ed. *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century /Ershi shiji mo zhongguo xiandai shuimo yishu zoushi* 二十世紀末中國現代水墨藝術走勢，Modern Ink and Wash Painting Series, I, Yang Liuqing huashe, 1993; Zhang Yu (Yu Ren郁人) ed. *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century /Ershi shiji mo zhongguo xiandai shuimo yishu zoushi* 二十世紀末中國現代水墨藝術走勢，Modern Ink and Wash Painting Series, II, Yang Liuqing huashe, 1995, Zhang Yu (Yu Ren郁人) ed. *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century /Ershi shiji mo zhongguo xiandai shuimo yishu zoushi* 二十世紀末中國現代水墨藝術走勢，Modern Ink and Wash Painting Series, III, Heilongjiang meishu chubanshe, 1996; Zhang Yu (Yu Ren郁人) ed. *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century /Ershi shiji mo zhongguo xiandai shuimo yishu zoushi* 二十世紀末中國現代水墨藝術走勢，Modern Ink and Wash Painting Series, IV, Heilongjiang meishu chunabshe, 2000, and one special edition, which was published in Belgium. Zhang Yu 張羽(Yu Ren郁人) ed. *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century /Ershi shiji mo zhongguo xiandai shuimo yishu zoushi*二十世紀末中國現代水墨藝術走勢. Special edition, Belgium, 1995.

17 Pi Daojian 皮道堅ed. *Jiushi niandai Zhongguo shiyan shuimo*九十年代中國實驗水墨 */Experimental Wash Painting of China in the 90s*. Hong Kong World Chinese Arts Publication Company Ltd., 1998.

18 Wen Changyun (editor). *Zhang Yu Self-Cultivation /*张羽修行. Gwangju Museum of Art, 2013.

19 Zhu Qi 朱其. *Zhang Yu The Modernist End of Ink-and-Wash/Shuimo dexiandaizhuyi zhongjie*水墨的現代主義終結. Hunan Meishu Chubanshe, 2015.

20 Zhang Yu張羽. *Art makes me Interview with Zhang Yu/Yishu Zuo ziji Zhang Yu Fangtanlu*藝術做自己張羽訪談錄. Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2014.

of various texts, his views on art and interviews with Zhang Yu, including an interview conducted by the present author.[21] The present author has also published a study about Zhang Yu's art "Crossing Ink River: Zhang Yu and his Contribution to the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash Painting".[22]

There are catalogues or books featuring other artists, such as *Liu Yiyuan Ink and Wash Art*[23], *Fable – Wei Qingji's works*[24], the catalogue from Wei Ligang's solo exhibition *Wei Ligang Song of the Phoenix Mirror*[25], *Wang Tiande – From Ashes to Flame,*[26] *Wang Dongling – Above Black and White*,[27] *Zhang Hao Mapping of the Soul, A Pictorial Biography*[28]. A book written by Zhang Hao *What Art gives me*[29] includes his works and his views on art, while also presenting a more intimate source, his diary in which he recorded his observations and feelings. Another source is a special issue of the journal *Art Online* devoted to abstract art, [30] published by the artistic website *zhuokearts.com.*[31]

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21 Zhang Cziráková, Daniela. „Beyond Ink and Wash, Beyond Abstract, Beyond Painting/Chaoyue Shuimo, Chaoyue Chouxiang, Chaoyue Huihua超越水墨、超越抽象、超越繪畫 ". Zhang Yu. *Art makes me Interview with Zhang Yu/Yishu Zuo ziji Zhang Yu Fangtanlu*藝術做自己張羽訪談錄. Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2014 , pp. 474-783.

22 Zhang Cziráková, Daniela. "Crossing Ink River: Zhang Yu and his Contribution to the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash Painting." *Studia orientalia Victori Krupa dedicata*. Slovak Academic Press, 2016, pp. 258-270.

23 Yu Lan 余澜 (ed.). *Liu Yiyuan shuimo yishu*劉一原水墨藝術*[Liu Yiyuan Ink and Wash Art]*. Hubei meishu chubanshe. 1998.

24 Du Huiling杜惠玲. *Yu yan Wei Qingji zuopin 2005 – 2013* 寓言魏青吉 作品*2005 – 2013*. Zhongguo Qinnian chubanshe, 2013.

25 Erickson, Britta, Yeung, Alan. *Wei Ligang Song of the Phoenix Mirror*. Ink Studio, 2016.

26 Shi Zhi食指. *Wang Tiande – From Ashes to Flame/Wang Tiande – Cong Huo dao Huoyan*. 王天德從灰到火焰 Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2012.

27 Xu Jiang許江, Shi Zhi食指. *Wang Dongling: Above Black and White*王冬齡：黑白至上. Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2012.

28 Shi Zhi食指. *Zhang Hao. Mapping of the Soul. A Pictorial Biography/Zhang Hao Xinling Tu*張浩 心靈圖.Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2012.

29 Zhang Hao張浩. *What Art Gives me /Yishu gei wo*. 藝術給我 Hebei meishu chubanshe, 2013.

30 *Art online Special edition of Abstract Art/Yishu zaixian, Chouxiang yishu zhuan kan* 藝術在線抽象藝術專刊. zhuokearts. Summer, 2010.

31 Printed version *Art online Special edition of Abstract Art/Yishu zaixian, Chouxiang yishu zhuan kan*藝術在線抽象藝術專刊. zhuokearts. Summer, 2010. Online version: http://qa.zhuokearts.com/onlinemagiz/default.aspx. Last retrieved 20 April 2019 is not

Hou Shanhu, *Shape series TG1902*, 2019, ink on paper

There are several studies concerning contemporary Chinese ink art written by the present author, such as "Writing without Words: An Influence of the Chinese Calligraphy on the Contemporary Ink Painting in the Mainland China,"[32] "*Abstrakcia ako dôležitá súčasť čínskej experimentálnej maľby tušom*" [Abstraction as an Important Part of Chinese Experimental Ink and Wash Painting],[33] and "Modern Tendencies in Contemporary Ink and Wash Painting in Mainland China since New Wave 85 up to Present"[34].

available anymore. See an online article promoting an issue. According to them, it is the first journal promoting abstract art. "Zhongguo di yi ben "Chouxiang yishu zhuankan" wenshi, wenzhang zuopin da huicui中國第一本《抽象藝術專刊》問世，文章作品大薈萃 [China's first "Special edition of Abstract Art" was published, a wide selection of articles and works]." *Arting365*, 3 Sept. 2010, indu.arting365.com/creative/2010-09-03/1283489621d226365_1.html. Last retrieved 29 January 2020.

[32] Zhang Cziráková, Daniela. "Writing without Words: The Influence of Chinese Calligraphy on Contemporary Ink Painting in Mainland China." *Journal of Sino-Western Communications*, 2014, vol. VI, no. 1, pp. 102–116.

[33] Zhang Cziráková, Daniela. "Abstrakcia ako dôležitá súčasť čínskej experimentálnej maľby tušom [Abstraction as an Important Part of Chinese Experimental Ink and Wash Painting]." *Miscellanea Asiae Orientalis Slovaca*. Univerzita Komenského, 2014, pp. 59-89.

[34] Zhang Cziráková, Daniela. "Modern Tendencies in Contemporary Ink and Wash Painting in Mainland China since New Wave 85 up to Present." *Studia orientalia Slovaca*, 2017, year 16, no. 1, pp. 143-174.

The abovementioned publications discuss not only abstract ink art but also focus on the works of individual artists or mention artists working with different media, such as oil painting or combined techniques. Several art journals, such as *Meishu, Meishu Sichao*[35]*, Art Life,*[36]*Art Gallery Magazine*[37]*, Art Thoughts* were used. In addition, internet sources were used, such as Artron[38], 99ys[39], *Art-Ba-Ba ARTSPY*[40], *Artintern.net*[41], *Art online*[42] and others.

Zhang Yu, the founder of the movement of Experimental Ink and Wash, is also rather sceptical about the term abstract, or at least abstract ink painting, despite the fact that many artists doing abstract paintings are part of his movement. He believes:

> For example, "abstract ink painting" belongs to "abstract painting", this is the art method and language in the history of Western art. It is a problem solved in the West in the 1960s and 1970s. So does "abstract ink painting" address the question of West abstraction or the issue of ink painting?[43]

After the year 2000, the famous Chinese art theorist Gao Minglu pointed out two movements in contemporary Chinese art closely connected with abstraction: Maximalism and Yi Pai. However, he was not very successful in putting his point across. Some people believe that the reason for this was

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35 *Meishu sichao*美術思潮, vol. 1, no. 4, 1985.

36 *Artlife /Yishujie*藝術界, Yishujie zazhi she, Guangzhou, no.9, 1997, no. 10, 1997.

37 *Art Gallery Magazine /Hualang*畫廊, Lingnan meishu chubanshe, Guangzhou, no. 3, 1996, and no. 4. 1996.

38 Yachang Yishu Wang雅 昌 藝術 網www.artron.net/. Last retrieved 29 January 2020.

39 *99 Yishu Wang, 99*藝術 網www.99ys.com/. Last retrieved 29 January 2020.

40 *Yishu yan*藝術 眼www.99ys.com/. Last retrieved 29 January 2020.

41 Yishu Guoji藝術 國際Artlinkart. "Chinese Contemporary Art Database." *ARTLINKART*, www.artlinkart.com/. Last retrieved 29 January 2020.

42 Yishu Zai Xian藝術在線www.artchn.com/. Last retrieved 29 January 2020.

43 Zhang Yu張羽. "Zi shi zhi zhong wo suo canyu de `shiyan shuimo'—zhe chang cheng bu shang yundong de yundong自始至終我所參與的「實驗水墨」—這場稱不上運動的運動[The "Ink Wash" as I participated in it from beginning to end – this is not a movement]", 28 November 2017, *kknews*, https://kknews.cc/culture/peg9ma8.html, last retrieval 18 October 2019. Zhang Yu sent the whole article, Zhang Yu, 張羽, 我為什麼推動 "實驗水墨"——自始至終我所參與的實驗水墨[The "Ink Wash" as I participated in it from beginning to end – this is not a movement], written by him in 2014, presented 19 November 2014, in Xizi Hupan, and 30 December 2014, in T3 International Art zone.

Liu Xuguang. *Traces*, *Yijing Calculations, Orientation, Space, Digital Deduction*, 2017, ink and mixed materials on paper

that he included all kinds of artists, painting in traditional ink as well as artists involved in oil painting, so some critics completely rejected his idea of abstraction in Chinese art. The concept of enforcing abstraction in China was received very coldly and met with criticism from several conservative-minded art theorists. Gao Minglu's intention when he launched the Yi Pai movement was to promote Chinese abstract art not only in China but also in many countries around the world. However, in his articles published online or in Chinese art journals, Gao mentioned that abstract painting was "imported" into China. He used to put the word abstract in quotation marks, which meant he used to write about "abstract" art instead of abstract art. Speaking in person, he continually doubted the idea of abstraction in Chinese culture. Gao Minglu claimed that there is no abstract painting in China strictly speaking, because Chinese art did not undergo the historical

experience of a break with representational painting, something which did not happen in China to such extent as it did in the West. He pointed out that Chinese painting came from a very different cultural background. In his opinion, abstract art was mostly a product of Western society, and it was not deeply rooted in Chinese culture. He did admit the existence of abstract art in China from a phenomenological approach only, because there are undoubtedly artists painting abstract works. Nevertheless he mentioned differences in the Chinese approach to abstraction.[44]

Gao Minglu believed that the lack of realistic representative painting in Chinese art history made it impossible to have a truly abstract art in China. He rightly claims Chinese abstraction to be different from Abstract expressionism, although they have some common characteristics, such as an emphasis on self-expression and a wild nature. Nevertheless, abstract art did not start by Abstract expressionism in the USA, but in Europe, at the beginning of the 20th century.

The crisis of the subject caused the plight of the object at the moment when confidence in so-called reality was lost. In order to end this crisis, Cubist painters created a new unclarity in which objects lost their usual meaning. The Cubists were not visionaries; they did not seek a transcendental truth. In this, they differed from both Italian futurists and abstract expressionists who formed the Blaue Reiter movement, absolute German abstraction around 1909-1910.[45] Abstraction responded to this crisis by creating a new, transcendental reality. In this reality, the lines and surfaces, as well as colours, are free from analytical, descriptive or symbolic functions and convey emotions directly to the viewer by using their pure form.

Gao Minglu was criticised for promoting 'abstract' painting,[46] and the criticism of abstract art was active in the whole of Chinese society since China opened its doors to contemporary art trends after 1979. For example, Niu Jianchun, in his critical article, argued that Western Abstract expressionism was motivated by a conscious rebellion against the politicisation of art and the active betrayal of ideological power. According to him, this

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44 An interview with Gao Minglu, 5 September 2019, Gao Minglu's apartment, Beijing.

45 Ponente, Nello. *Peinture moderne: tendances contemporaines*, Editions d'art Albert Skira, Paris, 1960, p. 9.

46 See Niu Jianchun 牛見春. "Wu pi zhi mao – "Yi Pai: lilun de shuangxiang queshi無皮之毛——"意派"理論的雙向缺失[Hair without skin – Yi pai, lack of theory in the both ways]." *News.99ys,* http://news.99ys.com/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=app_view&id=21101, last retrieval 21 September 2019.

history is missing in the Chinese cultural context. He called Chinese artists exploring abstraction a "group of hermits escaping from reality".[47] From a certain perspective, this argument can be seen as reasonable but there is no reason for such a negative connotation. Ultimately, the main goal of Chinese philosophy, especially in Daoism and Buddhism, is to escape from reality.

Abstract art in China for many contemporary artists represents an escape from reality. It is a way to leave behind all political and social pressure. Chinese abstract painting in mainland China seems to be completely remote from political events, trying to escape from a painful or disturbing reality. Chinese artists living in mainland China speak of abstract art as serious art, which is trying to delve deeper into the aesthetic principles. They are aware of the existence of Western abstract art and they want to distinguish themselves from Western artists. Zhang Yu claimed the ambitions of Chinese contemporary ink art to have the same status, to be in the same position as Western artists and enter into dialogue by using its specific artistic language.[48] Some of them are heavily influenced by Daoist and Buddhist ideas in their philosophical sense, while some artists are searching for an inspiration in ancient aesthetics and the theory of art.

The tendency to escape from frustrating reality to literature and art has occurred many times in Chinese art history. *Literati* painting in the late 11th century was initiated by Confucian scholars who turned their energies to literature and art.[49] During the '85 New Wave movement, and after the traumatizing experience of 1989, when the Tiananmen massacre destroyed the hopes for peaceful democratic reforms, there sprung up many art styles such as Political pop or Cynical realism that reflected the situation in China. Unlike the pioneers of abstraction in Europe who were influenced by leftist ideas or the avant-garde artists in Taiwan, who suffered from persecution, artists in mainland China involved with abstraction are trying to avoid any political content. It is impossible to avoid it completely, because after the Cultural Revolution, even using black colour

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47 Niu Jianchun 牛見春. "Wu pi zhi mao – "Yi Pai: lilun de shuangxiang queshi無皮之毛——"意派"理論的雙向缺失[Hair without skin – Yi pai, lack of theory in the both ways]." *News.99ys,* http://news.99ys.com/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=app_view&id=21101, last retrieval 21 September 2019.

48 WeChat communication with Zhang Yu, 20 January 2020.

49 Murck, Alfreda. *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy and Painting*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991.

Zhang Shuguang. *Speed Action Writing, No. 1*, 1996, ink on paper

had a certain political connotation, which was reflected in the '85 New Wave movement.[50]

There are some common features between Chinese artists doing abstract ink art and the origins of abstract painting. Abstract art is unconstrained by the rules of the real world. Artists are trying to express their feelings and their aesthetic views by using lines, colours and surfaces. One of the pioneers of abstract art, Kandinsky, in his *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* claims:

> Conventional beauty must go by the board and the literary element of "story-telling" or "anecdote" must be abandoned as useless. Both arts must learn from music that every harmony and every discord which springs from the inner spirit is beautiful, but that it is essential that they should spring from the inner spirit and from that alone.[51]

[50] That was visible during the iconic exhibition *China/Avant-garde* in February 1989, when the façade of the Chinese Art Museum was covered by black strips with the logo of the Chinese Avant-garde, similar to the road sign "no turning".

[51] Kandinsky, Wassily. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. The Floating Press, 2008. Pp.105-106.

Chinese art theorists are looking up to the West with admiration, considering it to be the place of origin for abstract art. They tend to forget that one of the fundamental sources of inspiration for many artists involved in abstract painting was Eastern (Chinese and Japanese) calligraphy and ink painting. The Chinese unawareness about abstract elements in Chinese art history and art theory was the result of the understanding of Modernism as a one-way road, where the only possibility to get inspiration was from other cultures. According to Edward Lucie-Smith,

> It was legitimate for Europeans to borrow what they liked from non-European supposedly clean sources. – there must be no exchange in the opposite direction. This attitude strangely contrasted with another principle that had been inherent to Modernism since its inception, namely that modernist approaches contained essential features of universal faith.[52]

This aspect of the theory of Modernism was pointed out by Lucie-Smith to emphasise its absurdity and it was involuntarily accepted by many Chinese art theorists, especially when it comes to abstract art. In refusing anything original in Chinese abstraction, they tend to overlook that strictly speaking the whole of contemporary Chinese art, and even the technique of oil painting comes from abroad. A rejection of everything that is not deeply rooted in Chinese cultural tradition and was influenced by Western art movement would erase the whole Modernist and avant-garde movement in China, as something that is only "copying Western patterns", although the existence of the Chinese avant-garde has been widely approved by most critics. It is easier to define specific Chinese features in, for example, pop art or neo-expressionism, than to find subtle differences between Western and Eastern abstract art. Abstract art is based on purely aesthetic principles and so it is more difficult to find in it something undoubtedly Chinese.

On the other hand, there are voices in the West claiming that Chinese calligraphy and Chinese ink painting are the essential source of inspiration for abstract art. Western art theorists often point to Chinese ink painting as one of the potential sources of abstraction. For example Lippit claims that the notion of abstraction could be traced back to the Tang dynasty painter Wang Mo (? – 805), who is credited with inventing the splashed-ink paint-

[52] Lucie-Smith, Edward. *Art Today*. Slovart, 1996. p. 8.

ing style.[53] There were several styles in abstraction such as geometric abstraction, or later lyrical abstraction, and prominent art movements, such as American Abstract Expressionism, but also individuals who do not consider themselves as a part of these movements.

Tobey visited China and Japan in 1934. Then he developed his celebrated "white writing," in which he attempted to symbolise the human spirit by applying the principles of Eastern calligraphy to the rhythms of Western civilization. [54] Tobey was deeply influenced by Asian thought. During his one-month stay in a Japanese monastery in 1934, he practised Zen brush technique.[55] The Oriental influence in his "white paintings" has been often discussed, and later, in 1957, he experimented with pure calligraphic lines. The East Asian influence may appear in some works of the Abstract Expressionists, although Soulages, Mathieu and Hartung denied any influence in their works.[56] The art and the whole aesthetic of Tàpies were greatly influenced by Chinese philosophy and calligraphy.[57] Especially in his later paintings in 1980 he was inspired by Chinese calligraphy. According to him, "thanks to Chinese calligraphers… we can understand how to use the brush and create the language of emotions."[58] Tàpies's devotion to East Asian art is shown in his foundation still organising courses of Japanese painting.[59] The story continues with the recently invented asemic scribbles, taking inspiration from automatic writing, graffiti and East-Asian Chinese calligraphy.[60] Chinese art and East Asian

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53 Lippit, Y. (2012). „Of Modes and Manners in Japanese Ink Painting: Sesshū's Splashed Ink Landscape of 1495". *The Art Bulletin*, 94(1), p. 56.

54 "Tobey, Mark." The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia®. 2013. Columbia University Press 27 Dec. 2020 https://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Tobey%2c+Mark, last retrieved 28 January 2020.

55 Johnson, Deborah J., et al. *Seeing and beyond: Essays on Eighteenth- to Twenty-First Century Art in Honor of Kermit S. Champa*. Peter Lang, 2005. p. 398.

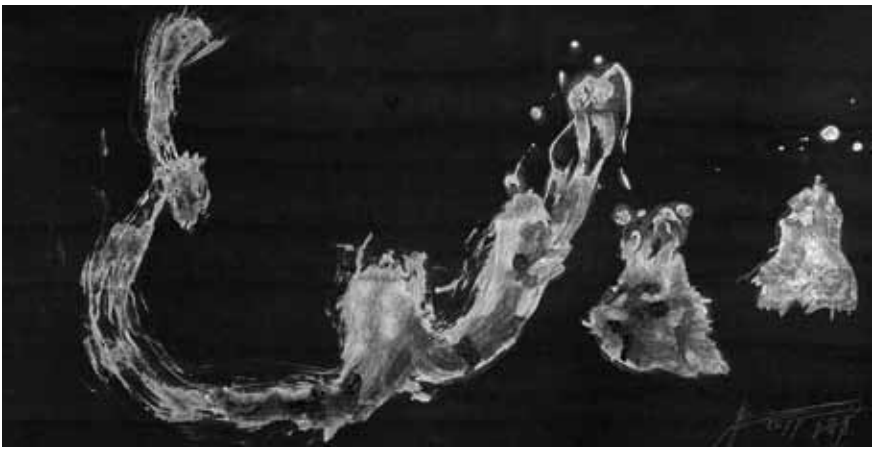
56 Sullivan, Michael. *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art from the Sixteenth Century to the Present Day*. Graphic Society, 1973, pp. 266-267.

57 Chen, Mei-Hsin. "The Nondualistic Aesthetics of Qi 氣 in Antoni Tàpies' Holistic Conception of Art." *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 70, no. 1, 2020, pp. 84–115.

58 Xiao Sheng嘯聲 (ed.). *Tàpies* 塔皮埃斯. Jiangxi meishu chubanche, 1996. Pp. 6-7.

59 See further in "Zen Painting and Aesthetics. The Gestural and Intuitive Brushstroke. Contemporary Sumi-e Course." *Fundació Antoni Tàpies*, fundaciotapies.org/en/activitat/pintura-estetica-zen-trac-gestual-intuitiu-curs-sumi-e-contemporani/. Last retrieved 28 January 2020.

60 For more about asemic writings see "On Asemic Writing." *Asymptote*, www.asymptote-journal.com/visual/michael-jacobson-on-asemic-writing/. Last retrieval 28 January 2020.

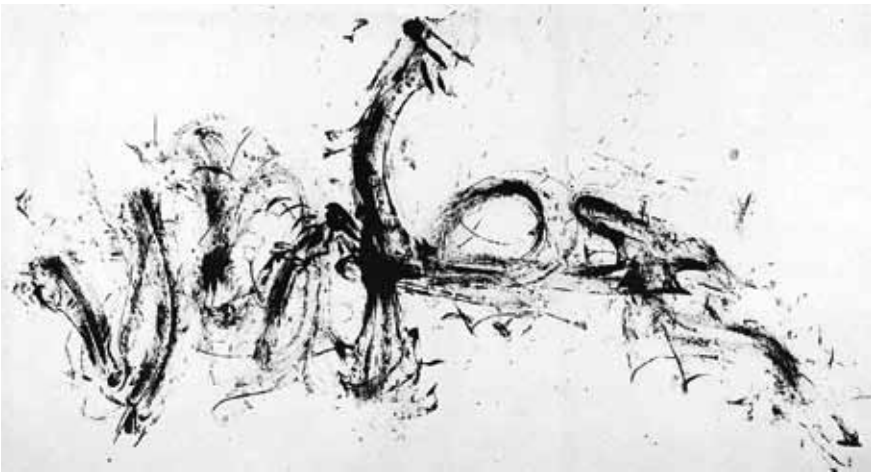


Wei Ligang. *Stone Garden*, 2019, ink and acrylic colours on paper

calligraphy heavily influenced many Western abstract artists. However, some Chinese artists are still reluctant to admit hidden abstract elements in their art as a part of the tradition, or a possible source for Chinese abstract painting.

There are rare examples of supporting abstract art in China. For example, Xu Demin, in his *Abstract Art in China*, traces the origins of abstraction in China back to Neolithic geometric ornamentation on ceramic vessels, and early bronzes from the Shang and Zhou dynasties. Xu believes that:

> Advocating the national and local features of Chinese abstract art does not mean excluding the internationalization of abstract art. It is not about being only focused on ourselves, and being like a frog observing the sky from the bottom of a well, but being more open and more international in vision and consciousness. Promoting the nationalization and localisation of abstract art is both a strategic cultural requirement and a national cultural mission. This sense of mission is not laid down by anyone, nor does it need to be appointed by anyone. It is a desire from the heart and instinct of Chinese abstract artists with a sense of national dignity and artistic self-esteem. A soldier who does not want to be a general is not good. Although this concept is not new, we still believe that an artist who does not have a sense of the world, does not have national aspirations and a sense of mission, and does not want to become



Zhang Dawo, *Free and Easy Wandering (090529 1842)*, 2003, ink on paper

a world-known master, is not a good artist, one who appeals to individuals, and even more so to a country.[61]

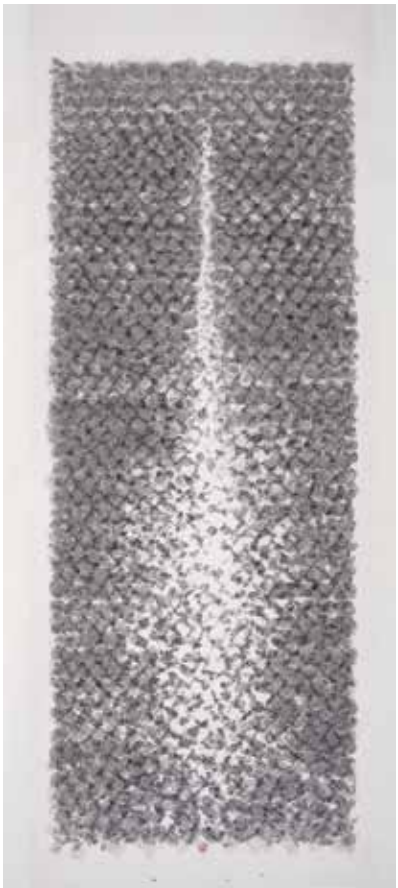
Although Xu's conclusions are far too cut and dried, pointing out abstract elements in Chinese art is encouraging for artists often accused of a lack of originality and of only copying foreign patterns.

The main argument against the use of the term "abstract" directly in Chinese art is that Chinese art theorists have overlooked the role of East Asian art in the process of establishing abstraction in Western art. They often argue that Chinese painting came from a different aesthetic tradition, and unlike Western art, it did not experience realism and its logic with an attempt to reproduce an illusion of visible reality. They did not realise that Chinese art used to be, during its historical development, just one step away from pure abstraction. Undeniably abstract features have been appearing and reappearing for thousands of years in Chinese art history and have been noticed in the West but remain neglected in mainland China, which after the painful experience of the Cultural Revolution, forgot a lot of its historical heritage.

[61] Xu Demin許德民. *Zhongguo de chouxiang yishu xue*中國抽象藝術學*[Chinese Abstract Art].* Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2009, p. 43.

One of the reasons for the harsh criticism which was at that time levelled against abstract painting is the fact that many of the concepts of traditional Chinese art theory or painting in the 20th century often encountered general misunderstanding among Chinese artists and art theorists. Chinese artists and intellectuals at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries were trying to break free from the bonds of tradition, and modernise the country by applying Western standards to anything. They were rejecting or underestimating essential elements in Chinese painting and its contribution to the art history, for example *literati* painting. They applied the concept of *literati* painting to the particular, specific style of some painters in the history of Chinese art, without considering it more comprehensively, in a broader context.

This imbalance became even more obvious in the name of the New Literati Painting, which appeared on the Chinese art scene in the early 1990s. This movement advocated a precise, archaic style of painting, with scenes from ancient times – fat horses, plump ladies, or typical Chinese scholars in ancient robes. Of course, this can be understood as a concept of perception of Chinese tradition, but the name of the movement suggests a spiritual connection with painters such as Su Shi (1036-1101),[62] Wen Tong (1018-1079) and others, which seems to be quite misleading. These artists in the eleventh century came with a particular emphasis on expressing the emotions of the artist. They emphasised its inner nature instead of the formal,



Chen Jiu. *Accumulations of Ink. Daylight*, 2016, ink on paper

[62] Also called Su Dongpo.

external resemblance of the object, which became a typical feature of traditional Chinese literary painting. That was the essence of *literati* painting, which distinguished it from palace painting. Those aspects are even more elaborate in the painting of Buddhist, especially Chan (known in Japan as Zen), and Daoist monks. When *literati* painting first appeared (Su Shi called it the painting of officials), it was something innovative, breaking all traditional concepts of art. Later, after centuries of existence, *literati* painting changed, slowly losing its vitality and its specific creative features. It turned into a kind of stiff academism, endlessly repeating the same patterns in composition and codified brush strokes.

Based on the traditional specifics of literati painting – breaking free from an external likeness, the expression of the author's emotions, or according to Ni Zan (1301–1374) so-called "playing with ink", experimental ink painting or even abstract ink painting should be considered as its true

Wang Dongling. *Free and Easy Wandering No. 1*, 2015, ink on paper

successor. The fact that the artists are using traditional brush strokes characteristic of Chinese painting and calligraphy, or any other conventional or contemporary technique is not very important. In ancient art theory, Zhang Yanyuan (c. 815- c. 877) and other art theorists in Chinese history emphasised spiritual similarity, (*shensi* 神似) over formal likeness (*xingsi* 形似). Therefore, abstraction, as something going beyond the form, is inherently close to the original spirit of Chinese painting, which used very often to abandon realistic depiction in favour of self-expression.

Since the end of the last century, the number of artists doing abstract art has increased significantly. They do face some problems, from the lack of acceptance by art theorists to the situation on the art market where abstract art tends to be marginalised. For these and other reasons, not all of them continue with abstract art for a very long time. The artists presented here are the ones that represent the essence of Chinese abstract art. Most of them have already established their position on the art scene; some of them are newcomers and for others abstract art is only a part of their artistic portfolio.

I. Sources and Inspirations for the Development of Abstract Ink Painting in Mainland China in Chinese Art History

Ink painting in the history of Chinese art has lived in the shadow of tradition for hundreds of years. The specific position of ink painting in China made it very popular but also brought the need for reform. The reform of Chinese ink painting has been a challenge for hundreds of years and turning to abstract ink painting is only one of the options for how to break the bonds of tradition.

Chinese ink painting[63] faces the same problems as Chinese painting in general since at least the period of Dong Qichang (1555–1636), the Chinese painter, scholar, art theorist and calligrapher. He became famous for his claim that everything had already been invented, that it is impossible to find a new style in painting. This almost postmodernist statement was later rejected by Shitao (1642–1707) and by other independent painters, underlining the originality and independent spirit of their work. We see here the recurring problem in Chinese art history: its long and glorious tradition has often been found to be constraining for its followers. Seeking to reform Chinese painting by using the language of Modernism is the decision which was begun by Lin Fengmian (1900–1991). We may say that the primary motivation of the new ideas in Chinese painting was to protest against the limits of tradition.[64]

One of the possible ways was by using the new media imported from Western countries – oil painting. This new medium offered new modes of expression that leave behind elements of the Chinese tradition. Although

[63] Some Chinese authors use another word for ink painting; they call it ink wash, which is a more exact translation of the Chinese word shuimo水墨. It refers to monochrome ink painting, in which different shades of ink, starting with dark and ending with pale, almost white, replace all other colours. See further in Lu Yilong. *The History and Spirit of Chinese Art*. Enrich Professional Publishing Limited, 2015, pp.176-179.

[64] Zhang Cziráková, Daniela. "Modern Tendencies in Contemporary Ink and Wash Painting in Mainland China from '85 New Wave up to the Present." *Studia Orientalia Slovaca*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2017, p. 143.

Dot pattern earthenware pot, half-mountain type, dating from 4700-4300

a more detailed analysis of, for example, Political pop art could find some similarities with Chinese folk art, oil painting has been regarded as a way to break with tradition.

Unlike oil painting, Chinese ink painting was perceived as a way of confirming cultural identity. Abstract or semi-abstract ink has been seen by many artists as a way of maintaining Chinese cultural identity. On the other hand, becoming involved in abstraction in ink painting means avoiding the traditional motifs, as well as avoiding the constant repetition of old motifs or unified brushstrokes defined in the *Mustard Seed Garden*.[65]

There are some voices claiming that abstract art was a part of human civilisation since its beginnings. According to Pohribny, since the Stone Age, in the historical development of art, abstract images were not the only ones to exist but there were also periods of abstract creation in prehistoric times. The era of more concrete art emerged after abstraction. Abstract artistic concepts, such as realism, have existed for thousands of years. They formed two trends which were antagonistic but balanced.[66] This is not defi-

[65] *Mustard Seed Garden* (Jieziyuan huapu芥子園畫譜) is the famous manual of Chinese painting, written in the early Qing dynasty, printed initially from woodblocks, a copy of this ancient book, published in 1782, is in the Brooklyn Museum, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/17617. It has been used as a manual for learning Chinese painting and has strongly influenced Chinese artists. For a modern edition see Li Yu 李漁 (Editor). *Mustard Seed Garden* (Jieziyuan huapu 芥子園畫譜) Jiangxi meishu chubanshe, 2011.

[66] Pohribny, Arsen. *Abstract Painting/Chouxiang huihua* 抽象繪畫. Jiangsu Meishu Chubanshe, 1993, p. 28.

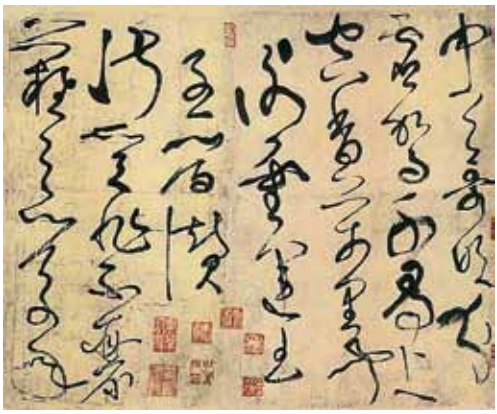
nite, and all these theories are not irrefutable. Therefore, it is not usual to speak about the existence of abstract art or of abstract and semi-abstract elements in art history.

Searching for the beginnings of abstraction in Chinese fine art takes us back deep into history, since the first artwork bearing definite abstract features is dated from before the earliest Chinese dynasty. People look at the symmetrical beauty of ornaments on Neolithic ceramic pots, admiring the designs of Chinese bronzes, which gradually abstracted the mystical religious ceremonial symbolism to geometric shapes.

Xu Demin argues that abstraction has a long tradition in China. According to him, the large-scale creation of abstract symbols and patterns by Chinese people started from the period of painted pottery. On the coloured pottery in the Yangshao culture and the Majiayao culture from 5000 to 6000 years ago, there are already a large number of mature abstract symbols, various types of geometric figures and abstract water-pattern shapes. There is no certainty that all these patterns on ceramics and bronzes can be recognised as abstract art. Concerning all these hypotheses, it is better to speak about semi-abstract or proto-abstract elements in Chinese art. When looking at these ornaments we can realise that something close to abstraction has been present in Chinese culture since its very beginnings. Although this kind of ornamentation is found in various Neolithic sites in the world and quite different geographic locations, this element of Chinese culture has never entirely disappeared and that can be considered as proto abstraction. [67]

In assessing the semi-abstract elements in Chinese fine art, it is essential to admit that, despite the fact that Chinese art was in various historical periods very close to abstraction, truly abstract art in terms of the release from restrictions of shape and reality was created in the West, although it was often inspired by East Asian art, especially by ink painting and calligraphy. The decisive step into the unknown territory of abstract art, releasing artists from the last ties with the reality, was much more difficult in China than might be expected in view of the history of Chinese fine art. The result of an incredible respect for tradition in Chinese cultural history was that any change in style that promoted originality or innovation needed much more creative energy and courage than in Western culture. Even

[67] Xu Demin許德民. *Zhongguo Chouxiang Yishu Xue* 中國抽象藝術學*[Chinese Abstract Art]*. Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2009, p. 41.



Crazy script calligraphy by Zhang Xu

though Chinese ink painting and calligraphy art encompass a particular semi-abstract potential that inspired foreign artists to create abstract works, Chinese painters engaged with pure abstract creation only after they had seen the abstract works of foreign artists.

I.1. Subjectivity and semi-abstract features in Chinese ink painting

Ink painting is one of the typical features of Chinese culture and expresses a whole spiritual world. In addition to poetry, which plays with subtle shades of language, Chinese artists have used brushstrokes to express their feelings. According to Daoist philosophy, identifying with the object of knowledge was one way of obtaining knowledge. The liberation of painting from its representative function, which created the conditions for self-expression, came later in Chinese art history than in other artistic genres, such as calligraphy or poetry, which were considered as high art earlier than painting. Nevertheless, painting has played a crucial role and its position tends to be extremely high.

Monochrome ink painting, especially *xieyi* 写意style, is painting using ink exclusively, without the addition of mineral colours. It dates back to the Tang dynasty when it became an independent style of painting. Monochrome ink painting uses all the technical possibilities of ink, and artists claim that various ink shades can replace colours. Therefore, it is common to say that "ink has five colours". The eminent painter and poet Wang Wei

Mi Fu. *Mountains and Pines in Spring*, ink on paper, National Palace museum, Taipei

(699 – 761?), who lived during the Tang dynasty, said that ink painting occupies the highest position and people respected it.[68] *Xieyi* style (the exact translation of this term is "recording, sketching ideas") does not seek to achieve 'external (or formal) similarity', but places particular emphasis on the brushwork, its strokes and their specific beauty, often combining the means of expression of painting and calligraphy.

Buddhism significantly influenced Chinese art during the Six Dynasties, the Tang dynasty and later. Since the Song dynasty, many of the particular achievements of painters have been associated with Chan Buddhism. At the end of the dynasty, there were artists such as Wang Mo and others who experimented with ink and the related transformation in landscapes, In their works we can trace the beginnings of the fast-sketched, wild method of ink painting called *pomo*潑墨, which means "splattering ink". Rapid spontaneous painting has been present in Chinese painting for over 1,000 years. Its origin dates back to the Tang dynasty and is associated with the names of such great painters as Wu Daozi (680 – c. 760), Wang Wei and others.

Speed and slowness were then considered to be more or less the same. The great painter could use any technique. However, in later centuries, critics' preferences were more and more directed towards the ideal of speed, spontaneity, of which Wu Daozi was the supreme representative. The cursive or simplified style of brush use was born in calligraphy much before it was used or systematically used in painting.[69] One of the most eminent painters of the Tang dynasty was Wu Daozi, also called Wu Daoxuan. This outstanding painter learnt calligraphy from the famous calligrapher Zhang Xu (about 658 – 747). His figurative murals were famous for their beautiful lines full of life. Later documents referred to him as the "sage of painting", *caoshu*草書 the divine painter (*huasheng* 畫聖).

The ideal of spontaneity and speed had its roots in calligraphy, especially in the aforementioned quickly written cursive *caoshu*. Wu Daozi, whom later art critics ranked among the top painters of that period, in the "divine" category, and whom later painters referred to as their model in the rapid, spontaneous painting, was inspired by the calligraphy of his teacher,

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[68] *Zhongguo meishu cidian*中國美術詞典*[Dictionary of Chinese Art]*. Shanghai meishu chubanshe, 1991, p. 4.

[69] Cahill, L, James. *Three alternative histories of Chinese Painting*. The Spencer Museum of Art University of Kansas, 1988, p. 74 (abbreviated).

Zhang Xu, the “Mad Calligrapher” who excelled in the unrestrained, illegible, crazy *kuangcao* 狂草.

Another famous Tang painter and poet, Wang Wei, was considered the creator of painting in wet-style *pomo* 破墨. Wang Wei, like Wu Daozi, painted figurative themes, landscapes, murals. He discovered the poetry in nature and began painting winter landscapes, stunning symbols of peace and solitude. After his death, Wang Wei was considered the founder of monochrome ink painting of the "Southern School" [70], as Dong Qichang, a Ming painter and art critic, later called it. The development of monochrome ink painting was continued by Song and later Ming and Qing *literati* painters.

> In the last century of the Tang dynasty, the focus of cultural activity shifted away from Chang'an and Luoyang to the southeast; it was in the region of Nanjing and Hangzhou that landscape painters made their most daring experiments in “breaking the ink”, while the breakdown of traditional restraints on artistic, on social, behaviour encouraged the eccentrics to include techniques of ink-flinging and-splashing quite wild as those of the New York School of the 1950s. The work of these expressionists, alas, is lost, but their styles were taken up by some of the Chan painters of the tenth century and again in the late Southern Song.[71]

According to Susan Nelson, ‘in enjoying freedom, the Tang painters, later in the particular category of *yipin* 逸 品, were rebellious and aggressively experimental.’[72] Nothing has been preserved from the works of these artists of the Tang dynasty who reached the limits of abstract painting in their work. Perhaps it was a style of painting that was not at the centre of attention at a later time, or simply because copying images created with this technique was quite difficult. As Michael Sullivan says:

> The essential difference between the late Tang eccentrics and the modern Action Painters is that, while the latter left their gestures and splashes as complete

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70 Cohn, William. *Chinese Painting*. Phaidon Press Ltd, 1951, pp. 49-50 (abbreviated).

71 Sullivan, Michael. *The Arts of China*. (Revised Ed.). Thames and Hudson, 1973, p. 143.

72 Nelson, Susan, E. “I-p‘in in Later Criticism“, Bush, Susan, Murck, Christian F. (editors). *Theories of the Arts in China*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1983, p. 416.

Wen Tong. *Bamboo in Monochrome Ink*. ink on paper, National Palace museum, Taipei

> statements, their Chinese predecessors of a thousand years ago, by a few deft touches of the brush here and there, turned their paintings into landscapes. But Action Painting and Chan expressionism belong to no period. They are moments in time and space that are not linked in any kind of historical continuity. They simply occur and occur again, in an eternal present.[73]

One of the specifics of traditional Chinese painting is the fact that, on the one hand, it did not try to use every means of capturing the external form of the object, and on the other hand, it paid particular attention to the formal perfection of the painting. The ways of handling the lines and brushstrokes of specific images were often more important than the subject they were displaying. These specifics apply mainly to the painting of painter-writers (*wenren* 文人) who favoured the free style of *xieyi*, and monochrome painting much more than *gongbi* 工筆painting (painting with a precise brush). These opinions started to be popular in later periods, whereas during the Tang dynasty spontaneous ink painting was not considered to be in a higher position than the *gongbi*, and the extensive use of mineral colours. It should be noted, too, that the theory of the scholar-painter doing his paintings exclusively for pleasure without any other commercial intent was never absolutely accurate; it was nothing but an often-claimed ideal and the practice used to be different.

During the Northern Song dynasty a few intellectuals around the famous poet and painter Su Dongpo, Wen Tong, well-known for his bamboos painted by calligraphic brushstrokes, Mi Fu (or Mi Fei, 1051 – 1107), and the scholar and calligrapher Huang Tingjian (1045-1105) started to use painting as a means of expressing their feelings and even of conveying their aesthetic views. They believed that the purpose of painting was not representation, the faithful description of objective reality, but expression. They avoided bright colours and actively preferred a grandiose, fast style, *xieyi*. They tried to paint under the influence of sudden inspiration, not limited by describing the outer shape of objects. They used to express themselves in monochrome paintings which suited their taste.[74]

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[73] Sullivan, Michael. *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art from the Sixteenth Century to the Present Day*. Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1973, p. 253.

[74] Yang Renkai楊仁愷 ed. *Zhongguo shu hua*中國書畫*[Chinese Calligraphy and Painging]*. Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991, p. 157.

The Song dynasty's scholar-painters took another step towards making the artist's cultural level a crucial part of the image. They emphasised that they were not professional artists, and were painting just for their pleasure. A great deal of their work was the expression of the artist's feeling. Their artworks and reflections are dominated by the effort to express subjective feelings and the atmosphere, a protest against the excessive copying of reality and exaggerated display of formal likeness (*xingsi*) based on outward similarity. Thus the Song dynasty's *literati* paintings influenced the scholar-painters of later centuries.

Chinese painting in its historical development has inadvertently achieved a high level of subjectivity, and it is used to favour expression over formal representation. In the amount of freedom which it uses in handling reality, it has moved very far from objective representation. It may even be said that some elements of traditional Chinese painting, such as blending with writing, combining different angles and the associated absence of a single angle of perspective, started to appear in Western art to the same extent since Modernism. However, we cannot deny the persuasive, realistic tendencies in Chinese painting that preceded or existed in parallel with this subjectivisation. Great emphasis is placed on the term "reflecting the ideas", or "creative/artistic conception" (*yijing* 意境) which can be described as "the natural look and expression of thinking and feeling, the harmony of objective reality with subjective feeling in landscape painting". According to Wang Yao-t'ing,

> The role of the painter is not merely to capture the external form of the subject. It is even more crucial for him to encapsulate its spirit or essence and make it visible to the viewer. When a painter works on particular scenery, his feelings are born. Some thoughts are difficult to express in words. We can capture them in painting, which is called the transfer of ideas. This fusion of scenery and emotion is what is referred to as the conception of ideas.[75]

For a traditional Chinese painting, in most cases a multi-focal composition is typical, which means that the lines in the picture do not have a single but a multiple focus. This factor has often caused problems in the acceptance of Chinese painting among Western art circles. For Chinese artists,

[75] Wang Yao-t'ing. *Looking at Chinese Painting*, Ningensha Publishing, Tokyo, 1996, p. 17.

this dictatorship of a scientific perspective, in which an object is observed from only a single point, was inconceivable and restrictive. White, unpainted space plays a unique role in the composition. It is possible that this was due to the influence of Buddhist philosophy. However, it might also be caused by the artist's desire not to say everything, to leave space for the imagination, for a poem, perhaps also for a laudatory statement by a later collector. According to Sullivan,

> The composition of a Chinese painting is not defined by the four walls of its mount like a European painting within its frame. Indeed, the Chinese painter hardly thinks of it as a "composition" at all. Those formal considerations to which the Western painter devoted so much attention, he takes very largely for granted.[76]

Western modern and contemporary painting has undergone great reform in its artistic tradition over the past two hundred years. Many works reveal the author's emotions. In painting, starting with Manet, Van Gogh, Matisse, Picasso, and contemporary artists, the artist's personality is reflected. From the artworks, it is possible to feel the artist's character more distinctly, which in some respects is somewhat similar to the subjective factor that we can find in hidden form in Chinese painting much earlier and more than in European art.

Chinese painting, using its expressive lines, added the dimension of time passing to the static image. At the same time, calligraphy, seals and the words of poems entered the painting. The poetic sense coincides with time. Starting with Kandinsky, some painters and aestheticians began to discuss critically the internal relationships between space and time in Western art. It may be said that Chinese painting from a certain point of view has already set an example in this area.[77]

Ancient Chinese scholar-painters sometimes emphasised objective reality in the creative process, but they mostly used their subjective perception in trying to simplify and vary the object of painting. That was called the "borrowing of forms", which means painting a particular object, for

[76] Sullivan, Michael. *The Arts of China*. (Revised Ed.). Thames and Hudson, 1973, pp. 163-164.

[77] Deng Fuxing鄧福星. "Qiantan zhongguo hua de gediao淺談中國畫的格調 [On the Style of Chinese Painting]". *Zhongguo shuhua*, vol. 18, 1986, p. 23.

Ni Zan. *Six Gentlemen*, 1345, Shanghai museum, Shanghai

example bamboo, in order to use it to express their personal feelings. This ingenious creative method crossed the boundaries of formal likeness. Scholar-painters were trying to maximise the ideal stage in ink painting in formal likeness to the object. Painters have often broken free from the limits of the objective appearance of the subject for their own needs, and they have expressed themselves by using artistic methods based on the abstract beauty of brush strokes and different intensities of ink shades. They would use various brushstrokes, change the speed of their work, and alter the amount of water in the brush to create particular wet or dry effects on the paper. The whole surface of the image was used relatively freely. In expressing the full range of their artistic feelings and imagination, they would use generously simplified or modified brush strokes in various ways. It was called the "movement of the brush follows the soul" (*bi sui xin yun* 筆隨心運). According to the opinions of *literati* painters, "capturing the inner resemblance of the object rather than just capturing its shape" (*yixiang zaoxing* 意象造型) always has a deep reason, no matter whether it is based on specific rules of using ink and brush, or on their aesthetic theories. According to Cahill,

> Calligraphic images of scholars-amateurs were not really quick or simplified interpretations of more finished and complete images than were the paintings of the best professionals. Instead, they were more or less self-sufficient structures of expressive strokes of brushes whose relationships to objects in nature were always problematic.[78]

Once there was the idea in painting theory that good painting did not need to maintain a realistic relation to its subject, it was only a question of time before one artist would take another step to escape from reality and be proud of the dissimilarity of his paintings, suggesting that he was dealing with a higher plane above the representational. The first Chinese artist to promote these views on painting was probably Ni Zan,[79] one of the four masters of the Yuan dynasty. His work is of particular importance for later painting as well as for the development of the subjective factor in

[78] Cahill, James, *Three alternative histories of Chinese Painting*. The Spencer Museum of Art University of Kansas, 1988, pp. 86 – 87 (abbreviated).

[79] Cahill, James. *Hills Beyond a River, Chinese Painting of the Yuan Dynasty*. Weatherhill, 1976, p. 166 (abbreviated).

Chinese painting. Ni Zan came from a wealthy family from Wuxi. He spent part of his life travelling by boat through the numerous lakes of southern China. His landscapes are rarely coloured, the brush strokes are simplified, painted with extremely light ink with a huge amount of water, cultivated, and conveying an atmosphere of loneliness. Ni Zan expressed his views on his art, as Cahill remarked:

> "My so-called paintings are, in fact, nothing more than unrestrained brush strokes, loosely outlined, not associated with formal resemblance (objects in nature), they are painted only for my pleasure." When one friend of his said that his bamboo does not resemble bamboo at all, he replied, "Ah, but the complete lack of similarity is not easy to achieve!"[80]

Independence from objective reality and the acknowledged subjectivity of the artist's work is something that European painting did not achieve to such an extent until the early modern era. This idea is visible, for example, in Van Gogh's paintings, which are precious precisely because they express the author's subjective feelings, his artistic vision, without being restricted by objective reality. It is possible that Western painting was released from the obligation of realistically capturing objective reality only after the invention of photography, and it cannot be discounted that artistic photography, as far as possible, seeks to escape its own descriptive function to achieve the particular aesthetic purpose of the artist.

The scholar-painters were not the only ones who applied the principles of subjectivity in painting. There are numerous painters in Chinese art history, inspired by Daoism or Buddhist or Chan Buddhist ideas, who abandoned the established rules of painting, as happened many times in Chinese history, at the end of the Tang dynasty or later, for example during the Ming dynasty. It seems that the style and technique which is called "wild" began in the later and more spontaneous works of Dai Jin (1388-1462) and was developed in the art of Wu Wei (ca. 1459–1508), Lin Liang (ca. 1424—1500), Xu Lin (1462–1548), as well as that of Jiang Song (first half of the 16th century), Wang Zhao (early 16th century), Zhang Lu (Ming dynasty), Zhu Bang (16th century) and others. Painters preferring this style were almost all professional masters. All these painters were described by

[80] Cahill, James, *Three alternative histories of Chinese Painting*. The Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1988, p. 88 (abbreviated).

expressions such as “attacking directly”, “furiously brushed”, “throw ink on paper and let it drip”, which suggests that they used their professional skills in an area similar to a simple process of spontaneous creation. Several known terms may describe their techniques (“axial strokes”, sometimes as points, the “boneless”, method) but generally use is made of such vague terms as splashes.[81]

Shitao. *Pavillion in the Mountains*[82]

Many of these paintings called “wild” at the time they were created, because of their subjectivity of expression and degree of stylisation are comparable to the abstract painting of the twentieth century. The concept of abstraction or abstract art is a term that emerged in Western avant-garde movements. At any point in the history of Chinese art history when there appeared a painting which could be described nowadays as semi-abstract, its contemporaries could only use different words or expressions such as “unconstrained by reality”, “free from shape”, or “not expressing external likeness”.

During the Qing dynasty “external likeness” was abandoned again in favour of the expression of the artist’s subjectivity, his ideas and feelings.

[81] Barnhard, Richard, M. “The ‚Wild and Heterodox School‘ of Ming Painting.” Bush, Susan and Murck, Christian F. (editors). *Theories of the Arts in China*. Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 370 (abbreviated).

[82] Source: Världskultur Museerna Östasiatiska Carlotta, Sweden.

Emphasis started to be placed on the specifics of an artist's personality.[83] Individualists, such as Zhu Da (Bada Shanren, 1626 – 1705), Shitao, or artists of the Yangzhou school in the 18th century (better known as the Eight Eccentrics from Yanzhou), the Shanghai school and the others, brought Chinese art to the high point of subjectivity and self-expression as the most crucial artistic imperative.

In Shitao's works from his late years, we see a tendency towards subjective artistic expression on the verge of abstraction, freedom in playing with lines where the external similarity or hint of a landscape is barely recognisable, and perhaps not very important in terms of the work itself. Strong abstract features are reflected mainly in the paintings of the late period. The most striking examples of this style include his painting *Ten Thousand Ugly Ink Dots*.

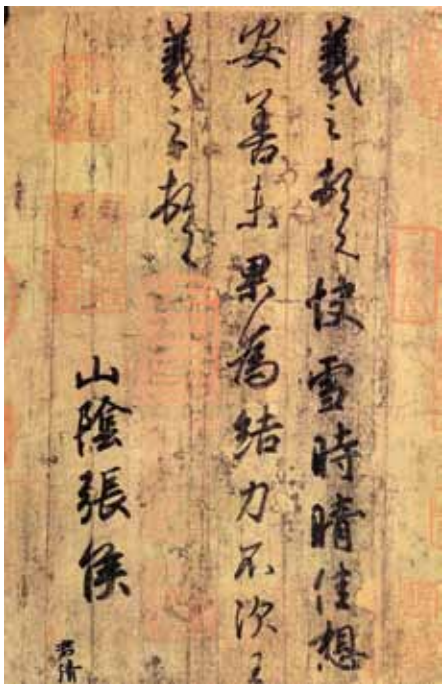
I.2. The ancient art of Chinese calligraphy as a source for abstract painting

The art of Chinese calligraphy is an important source of inspiration for many contemporary Chinese artists involved in abstract painting. According to Western art theorists looking at the art of Chinese calligraphy, the resemblance to abstract art becomes immediately apparent. The lines of Chinese calligraphy have inspired a number of Western artists to develop their abstract painting, for example Mark Tobey, Georges Mathieu, Hans Hartung, Henri Michaux or later Antoni Tàpies and others. Some of them had learned Chinese or Japanese calligraphy, which became an essential source for their paintings. From the western point of view, the abstractness in most works of calligraphy was undeniable.

The perception of calligraphy from a Chinese cultural perspective is quite different from the Western point of view. For many years, abstract painting in the mind of Chinese artists, especially those living in mainland China, was considered as something strange, hardly acceptable, and coming from a different culture without any connection with Chinese tradition, or even with calligraphy. Chinese artists and art theorists readily accepted

[83] Li Zehou李泽厚. *Mei de licheng*美的历程*/History of Beauty*. Beijing Wenwu chubanshe, 1982, p. 185.

the technique of oil painting, and its realistic tradition, different from the subjectivism of traditional Chinese ink painting. Western realism was accepted relatively smoothly whereas the introduction of abstract painting and the recognition of abstract features in Chinese calligraphy as a possible source of inspiration for contemporary artists in mainland China was a long process. The change in attitude happened at the end of the twentieth century when some Chinese artists started to paint abstract paintings using Chinese ink, revealing the obvious influence of the lines of calligraphy. Some of these artists were in some way connected with the movement of Experimental Ink and Wash; some of them use different names for their style such as Abstract calligraphy, or False calligraphy.



Calligraphy by Wang Xizhi, National Palace museum, Taipei

Chinese art theorists in the past have often discussed whether painting and calligraphy have a common origin. This theory was probably mentioned by painters because calligraphy for the recording of sacred texts was considered to be an art form much earlier than painting; later they tried to elevate painting to the social status already attained by calligraphy. Calligraphers derived the origins of calligraphy from the hexagrams

in the Book of Changes (*Yijing* 易经). Calligraphy obtained the status of an independent art form around the Wei dynasty (220-265). It should be mentioned that records about calligraphers from before the Wei dynasty have been preserved.

Chinese characters began to evolve in parallel with the development of Chinese bronzes. Writing as calligraphy in China later became a distinctive and unique type of art. The art of calligraphy has more than 3000 years of history. Unlike paintings, calligraphy does not use colour; it resorts to the use of abstract lines. Calligraphy is one of the traditional Chinese fine arts, in which the Chinese used a round brush, characteristically different from the structure of the European hair brush, and ink. The art of calligraphy includes various styles originating in different historical periods, but still used in calligraphy, such as inscriptions on bones *jiaguwen* 甲骨文, script used on bronze *jinwen* 金文, seal script *zhuanshu* 篆書, clerical style *lishu* 隸書, regular style *kaishu* 楷書, cursive style *xingshu* 行書, and already mentioned fast-written style *caoshu*, which evolved from the historical development of Chinese characters, used by calligraphers. Each style has its own rules and aesthetic value.

Fast-written *caoshu* verbalises more complex written characters in a general sense. Whatever the historical period in which the characters originated, they were destined to be simplified up to illegibility. In the strict definition, *caoshu* is calligraphy whose characters are written in relatively rapid, simplified strokes. At the beginning of the Han dynasty, the *zhangcao* 章草 was used, in the late Han dynasty *jincao* 今草 was created, which was later named *caoshu*. The famous calligrapher Wang Xizhi (303 to 361, or 321 to 379) raised *caoshu* to a high artistic level. Artists from the Tang dynasty, Zhang Xu and Huaisu (725-785), used to write even more ferociously. Their artworks are unrestrained, scrawled, the movement of their brush reminiscent of a snake's attack. They mainly used crazy *kuangcao*. *Kuangcao* has a unique position in the history of calligraphy.

"Crazy" *kuangcao*, or wild cursive script, is the type of calligraphy which is closest to abstraction. The letters are almost illegible, but it is distinguished from pure abstraction by the existence of text messages, information, albeit vague and incomprehensible for those who do not know the rules of calligraphy, as well as the existence of at least approximate rules of writing and composition of the characters. Adherence to these rules for writing individual characters depends on the artist. The rules of writing, such as the order of the strokes, served as a support and

at the same time as an excuse or explanation of the bizarre stokes of calligraphy, who went far beyond the rules. Chinese artists are thrilled by the grace, and by their vigorous style. Some types of *kuangcao* are overflowing with energy, other times the harmony of form is the focus of attention. The fascination arises from the significant contrast between symmetry and random composition within the individual characters or the entire inscription. Sometimes the beauty of the wild forms of *kuangcao* jumps out of the apparent chaos.

The cursive script (especially the wild cursive script) is the most unconstrained among the calligraphic styles, being free from the restriction of other styles. It demands a differentiation of written characters, but it is unnecessary to follow the calligraphic rules strictly. Also, the structure of the dots and strokes can be changed. With all these advantages, in the cursive style the calligrapher can do his best to seek beauty, put all his feeling on paper and fully demonstrate his calligraphic techniques.

Although *kuangcao* cannot be regarded as a genuinely abstract painting, because of the existence of a text, in expressing the personal feelings of the writer, using the power of lines, the artistic language of calligraphy is close to abstraction. The viewers' attention is attracted by the visual aesthetics of the text much more so than to the content. That is not only in the case with *kuangcao* but also in other styles of calligraphy with some authors. The very essence of calligraphy, which does not seek to depict but to capture meaning (writing text), has much in common with abstract paintings. Calligraphy itself is close to the abstract, but it is *caoshu* that comes closest. Not only for its characters but mainly because it was often used by its authors to express feelings. While the illegibility of some historically older fonts, for example, *jiaguwen* or *zhuanshu,* is caused by their antiquity or lack of codified language, their original function was primarily in recording information. More recent artists often wrote in a particular way in order to express their subjective feelings. They were using Chinese characters as their artistic language.

Among all the kinds of calligraphic script the cursive script expresses the aspect of time. In other scripts, the aspect of time is expressed in the movement and orientation of strokes and the order of strokes. However, the including of time in the cursive script is the result of the continuity between two characters or between two strokes, directly visible to the reader.

Another vital factor proving that calligraphy is an art form is the existence of a large number of texts discussing its particular styles, or cal-

ligraphy itself. There are the early texts of Xiao He (257－193 BCE)[84], or Bizhentu[85] attributed to Madame Wei (Wei Shuo 272-349),[86] who is known mainly as the teacher of the famous calligrapher Wang Xizhi, and a number of later texts by famous painters, calligraphers and art theorists, in whose works we can discover the way in which they regarded this activity. They are important not only for the development of calligraphy into an art form, but also because some of their ideas had an impact on Chinese art as a whole.

Huaisu. One of Huaisu's surviving works

The purpose of this study is not to write the history of Chinese calligraphy but some attention needs to be paid to it because in ancient times Chinese artists were often calligraphers, painters and poets. According to the historical records of various dynasties, the number of famous calligraphers in the time of the Six Dynasties largely exceeded the number of painters. The above-mentioned Wang Xizhi was an excellent calligrapher of the Eastern Jin period, as was his son Wang Xianzhi, also called Wang Zijing (344-388).[87] The Tang dynasty is characterised by its large number of great calligraphers, such as the four great masters of the Tang dynasty, Ouyang Xun (557-641), Zhu Suiliang (596 to 658, or 659), Yan Zhenqing (709-785), an outstanding representative of the reform of *kaishu*, and Liu Gongquan (778-865). The most important representatives not only of *kuangcao* but of the overall atmosphere of the Tang period were Zhang Xu and Huaisu.[88]

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84 "且筆者心也。墨者手也，書者意也，依比行之，自然妙矣。[Brush becomes mind, ink becomes the hand, and writing reflects the idea. If these principles are followed, beauty will appear naturally]. Wang Xuelin王學林, Xue Feng 薛鋒(ed.). *Jianming meishu cidian*簡明美術詞典*[Concise Dictionary of Art]*. Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1985, p. 244.

85 筆陣圖.

86 Yang Renkai楊仁愷 ed. *Zhongguo shu hua*中國書畫*/Chinese Calligraphy and Painting*. Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991, p. 33-34.

87 Yang Renkai楊仁愷 ed. *Zhongguo shu hua*中國書畫*/Chinese Calligraphy and Painting*. Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991, p. 44.

88 Yang Renkai楊仁愷 ed. *Zhongguo shu hua*中國書畫*/Chinese Calligraphy and Painting*. Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991, p. 119-120.

> The calligraphy of Zhang Xu and Huaisu is like the trees dancing in the spring wind. Sometimes it recalls the battlefield, where we can see ten thousand running horses, in other places it looks like clouds, flying in the strong wind. Its dynamic evokes the movement of waves, or a monkey leaning from the tree over the river and drinking water. We can say that these masters of calligraphy have expressed various forms of beauty as well as a reflection of reality, symbol *xiang*. They had captured the infinite forms of the world.[89]

Many distinguished calligraphers appeared in all later dynasties, regardless of whether they devoted themselves exclusively to calligraphy or painting. Painting, calligraphy and poetry created a specific framework in which Chinese artists operated. As Sherman Lee stated:

> One cannot possibly overestimate the importance of calligraphy in the origins of Chinese painting. The written word, or rather idea-character, was of inestimable value to the Chinese. Through writing one could enter the realm of the classics, the world of literature, and from there into the world of the scholar-official, someone who really mattered. Reason combined with knowledge made the ideal man; and calligraphy, together with the more specialised subject of painting, was the means by which the ideal character was expressed.[90]

In other words, calligraphy played a key role in developing traditional Chinese ink painting. It is possible to find many mentions of calligraphers, the ways of using brush and ink, comparing their brushstrokes to running horses, flying birds or fighting snakes. For the purpose of this study, the most important thing is the fact that in the Chinese tradition it has never been assumed that calligraphy is an abstract art. Even art theorists calling for a reform in calligraphy usually spoke of the importance of a new way of writing, of the need to create a new modern style of calligraphy.

Calligraphy, as an art of lines, has much in common with abstract painting. Each type of calligraphy is formally closer to abstraction, understood from the position of contemporary art, more than any genre of painting. Lines have their speed, style, specific aesthetics, sometimes it even

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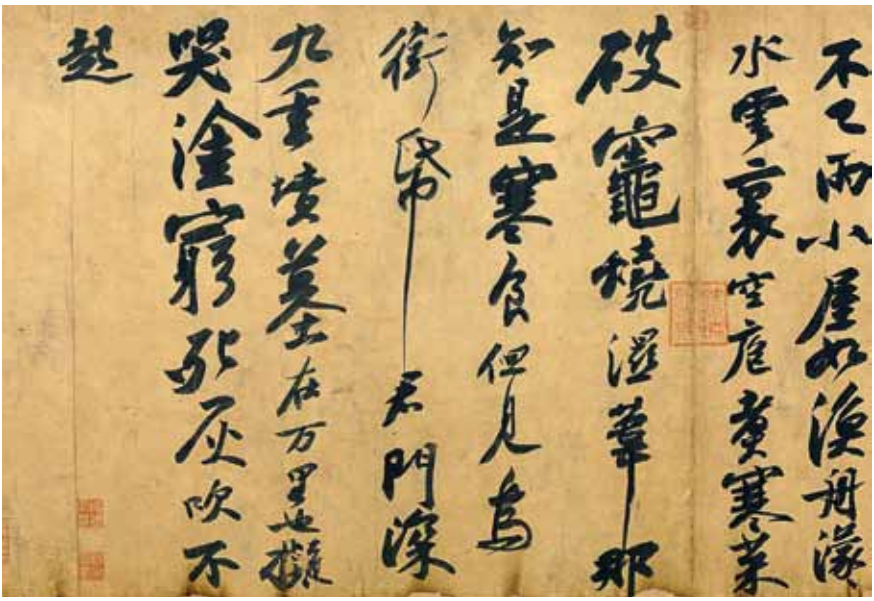
89 Wu Hong'en鄔鴻恩. *Zhongguo shufa jiqi xianzhuang. Zhongguo xiandai shudao xiu zuo zhan* 中國書法及其現狀中國現代書道秀作展*[Chinese calligraphy and its status. Exhibition of Excellent works of Modern Chinese calligraphy]*. Yokohama, 1992.

90 Lee, L. Sherman. *The Colors of Ink*. Asia Society Inc, 1974, p. 10.



Su Dongpo. Calligraphy. *The Cold Food Observance*, ink on paper, National Palace museum, Taipei

seems to us that calligraphic inscriptions are living their own lives. 'The characters written with the brush are admired for their abstract beauty and subtle details of structure, their lines and their rhythms'[91]. The calligrapher can express his personality through the dots and lines and express his own deepest feelings. Chinese characters have unique abstract features. They are characterised by a much higher degree of freedom and a greater variability than the geometric lines on painted ceramic ornaments.

Despite being a highly disciplined skill, calligraphy allowed the individual artist freedom for personal interpretation. After mastering the basic rules of strokes, the established methods of joining characters and adoption of the compositional patterns, there is room for subjective expression. The rules that provide refuge to the average artist, the limits of calligraphy, were often exceeded by outstanding artists. However, that happened not only in calligraphy but at the same extent in the whole of Chinese painting.

[91] Scott, A. C. *Literature and the Arts in Twentieth-Century China*. Garden City, 1963, p. 85.

In the creative process of calligraphy, the layout of the lines and the strokes presents how the author perceives reality, even reflects the nature, feelings, morality, and the whole personality of the author. Even though calligraphy does not copy specific shapes or objective reality, it sufficiently clearly expresses the artist's aesthetic relationship to the objective world. People very often believed that calligraphy is an "imaginary picture of reality" (*yixiang*意象). The conditions to create the image of reality are in the artist's free imagination, his subjective perception, as well as in his understanding of objective reality. There are certain connections between the art of calligraphy and abstract art.

I. 3. The theoretical basis for abstract painting in ancient Chinese art theory

There are clear differences from western art theory in the system of Chinese art theory; for example, relatively little space is devoted to the concept of beauty as an aesthetic category. On the other hand, attention to landscape painting or the understanding of landscape as an independent subject of painting in Chinese cultural tradition developed much earlier than in the West. Apart from this, one of the main features of Chinese art theory is the emphasis which some authors put on the expression of certain philosophical principles. Chinese painting is characterised by its common interest in transcendental phenomena, in things which are beyond the picture.

Hints of future writings on art can be found in the works of early philosophers discussing various aspects of Chinese society. In the *Great Commentary* of the ancient *Book of Changes, Yijing*, which can also be described as a philosophical interpretation of the *Yijing*, there are words such as *xiang*象, translated in the context of painting as "image", "representation" or "form".[92]

Painting as understood in Chinese art criticism could be considered as a means for expressing the author's subjective image, but also as the capturing of natural laws, making them visible, and perhaps understanding

[92] Bush, Susan, and Hsio-yen Shih. *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*. Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 2.

these laws through an artistic act. It is worth mentioning that many artists were also art critics, in fact only references to paintings, not the works themselves, have been preserved from the oldest times.

Subjectivity, emphasis on expression, self-expression, and the independence of the creator from objective reality are specific features of contemporary abstract art. Abstract art originally came into existence as a result of the crisis of the object at the beginning of the 20th century in the West. This kind of painting creates another transcendent reality, different from the world we know. This world of lines, surfaces and colours, conveying strong emotions, exists only on the canvasses of its creators. Contemporary abstract art emphasises the subjective feelings of the authors, their emotional reaction to the world, which is more important than a precise artistic representation of objective reality.

The importance of subjectivity was visible also in early scholarly texts in Chinese history, often written by painters. The beginnings of a specific art theory evaluating the spiritual energy of *shenqi* 神氣as the highest goal of art, trying to capture the spirit of the object through its external form, dates back to the philosophy of *Huainanzi* 淮南子 by Liu An (175 B. C. E. – 122 B. C. E.).[93] The fact that a painting required the unification of dualities was admitted by a prominent painter living during the Eastern Jin dynasty, Gu Kaizhi (ca. 345 – 406), the author of two essays on painting, which were later commonly referred to as *On Painting (Lun hua* 論 畫).[94] Zong Bing (375 – 444) in his *Essay on Painting* believed that the painter, in capturing the scenery, can express the philosophical concept of Dao. According to him, spirit is more important that the form.[95]

It is essential to realise that this emphasis on specific elements lying outside objective perception has existed in Chinese art theory since its beginnings. There are several concepts emphasizing the subjectivity of artistic creation, preferring the author's personal feelings and emotions to the precise imitation of nature. These are terms like "transcending ideas"

93 Yu Yuan, *Lun yishu xing shen lun zhi san pai*, in Wenyi yanjiu 89/6, p. 37.

94 Bush, Susan, and Hsio-yen Shih. *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*. Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 10.

95 Ge Lu葛路, *Zhongguo gudai huihua lilun fazhan shi* 中国古代绘画理论发展史 *[The Development of Ancient Chinese theory of painting]*, Shanghai renmin yishu chubanshe,1983, pp. 24 – 28.

(*chuan shen* 傳神), "spiritual consonance" (*qi yun sheng dong* 氣韻生動) "creative/artistic conception" (*yijing*),[96] or spiritual energy (*shenqi* 神氣). The inner correspondence of subject with object *shensi* 神似 is often more valued than its "external likeness" (*xingsi*). For example, the Late Tang painter Zhang Zao (active ca 766 – 778) was concerned with the relations between objective reality and emphasised subjective feelings. According to him, it is not enough to learn from nature, it is more important to focus on the mind.[97] Many Chinese art critics prefer *xieyi* "sketching ideas, capturing the atmosphere", which is also a style of painting using generous fast brushstrokes, to describing it realistically (*xieshi*寫實). They prefer "capturing a state of mind" (*xiexin*寫心) to "keeping a formal likeness" (*xiexing*寫形). In Chinese art we can often notice "perceiving nature or the outside world through the author's mind" (*xinshi zaohua*心師造化) as well as other aspects lying beyond formal representation.[98]

The development of landscape painting, flower and bird painting was significant during the Song dynasty. Since the beginning of *literati* painting, art theory started to emphasise the personality of the author, his individuality. Painting was gradually losing its representational function and starting to stress the inner world of the artist. For example, the famous essayist, historian, poet, calligrapher, politician and art theorist Ouyang Xiu (1007 – 1072) believed that it was easier to capture the form than the spirit of an object. He claimed that the artist should forget formal likeness in order to attain an idea (*wang xing de yi*忘形得意), although only a few artists are able to achieve this. [99] Many artists in that period supported this idea, but they mistakenly attributed it to his student, Su Shi, who also favoured inner correspondence (*shen si)* to formal likeness (*xing si)*, and protested against judging the quality of a painting according to its resemblance to the

[96] Wang Xuelin王學林, Xue Feng 薛鋒(ed.). *Jianming meishu cidian*簡明美術詞典 *[Concise Dictionary of Art]*. Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1985, p. 40.

[97] Ge Lu葛路, *Zhongguo gudai huihua lilun fazhan shi* 中国古代绘画理论发展史*[The Development of Ancient Chinese theory of painting]*, Shanghai renmin yishu chubanshe,1983, p. 65.

[98] Yu Lan 余澜. "Lun yishu xing shen lun zhi san pai 論藝術形神論之三排[Discussing three theories of form and spirit]", *Wenyi yanjiu*, no. 6. 1989, p. 37.

[99] Ge Lu葛路, *Zhongguo gudai huihua lilun fazhan shi* 中国古代绘画理论发展史*[The Development of Ancient Chinese theory of painting]*, Shanghai renmin yishu chubanshe,1983, p. 65.

Zhu Da. *Two Birds*, ink on paper

object.[100] The ideas behind the spirit of works of art instead of their formal resemblance to the object can be found in a great number of later artist and theorists.

[100] Ge Lu葛路, *Zhongguo gudai huihua lilun fazhan shi* 中国古代绘画理论发展史*[The Development of Ancient Chinese theory of painting]*, Shanghai renmin yishu chuban-she,1983, p. 82.

The involuntary similarities between brushstrokes in ink painting and calligraphy are typical features of Chinese art. The famous painter and calligrapher Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322) contributed to the theory of art with his opinion that the use of equal strokes in painting and calligraphy is desirable and the essence of these strokes is the same. He was not the first to come up with this idea: Zhang Yanyuan noticed that Wu Daozi's brushstrokes were inspired by the crazy wild script of Zhang Xu. The idea of using the same strokes is evident in the works of later painters, such as in the flower paintings of Xu Wei (1521–1593), or the late Qing painters Jin Nong (1687 – 1763) and Wu Changshuo (1844-1927), who started to become involved in painting at a relatively advanced age, but they mastered calligraphy. The notion of the similarities between the strokes in painting and calligraphy became the objective rule of traditional Chinese painting.[101] Ni Zan in his art theories promoted the idea of the "unrestrained brush" (*yi bi*逸筆) and "unrestrained spirit" (*yi qi*逸氣). According to him, the "unrestrained brush" is an expression of the formal side of the painting, while the "unrestrained spirit" expresses his views and feelings.[102] With regard to the use of brushstrokes in contemporary abstract painting it is clear that there are some parallels with ancient art theory. Contemporary artists can find support for their way of using the brush in abstract ink paintings in ancient art criticism. It is well-known that Chinese calligraphy was one of the sources of inspiration for Western abstract expressionists as well as for lyrical abstraction, and other styles of abstract painting in the West.

The concepts mentioned above, as well as the theories which created them, mostly stress the artist's personal feelings, their inner world. The work of art is often understood as the author's subjective reaction to the outside world. These specific features of Chinese painting, which have been stressed and highlighted by many Chinese art theoreticians in various historical periods, in some ways correspond with the contemporary interpretation of abstraction in art.

Regardless of the extensive history of Chinese ink subjective painting that shows clear features of abstraction, it is essential to realise that Chi-

[101] Ge Lu葛路, *Zhongguo gudai huihua lilun fazhan shi* 中国古代绘画理论发展史*[The Development of Ancient Chinese theory of painting]*, Shanghai renmin yishu chubanshe,1983, p. 132.

[102] Xue Yongnian 薛永年. *Shu hua shi lun conggao*書畫史論從高*[On the history of calligraphy and painting]*. Sichuan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992, pp. 119 – 120.

Wu Guanzhong, *Early Spring*, 2008, silkscreen print

nese abstract art came into being as the result of the influence of Western abstract painting, combined with inspiration from Hong Kong and Taiwan, the works of overseas Chinese artists involving in abstract painting, and, as some artists claimed, from the avant-garde Japanese calligraphy of the 1950s. Chinese art was very close to abstract art in various historical pe-

riods, but the decisive step into the unknown by which the artist breaks the last ties with the real world has been much more difficult than it looks from the point of view of the history of Chinese art. Respect for tradition meant that much smaller changes in technique required a lot of energy and courage. Although Chinese ink and calligraphy art definitely contained some potential that inspired foreign artists to create abstract works, Chinese painters most probably turned to purely abstract artwork after seeing the works of international colleagues.

Chinese art had a firm foundation for moving to abstraction and that step was made by Westerners strongly inspired by East Asian (mostly Chinese and Japanese) calligraphy and the subjectivity of ink painting. Despite that, Chinese artists have often had to argue that doing abstract art does not mean that they are "blindly following the West".

II. Inspiration from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan

The cultural movement that took place in Taiwan and Hong Kong was significant for the development of Chinese abstract art. During the 1950s, art movements such as Abstract expressionism and Abstraction lyrique were coming in from the West. The first artistic groups began to create paintings based on the concept of abstraction or the abstract in the true sense of the word. Other stimuli for the formation of art groups in Taiwan and Hong Kong, such as the Fifth Moon Group in Taiwan, in two art groups in Hong Kong, had played a vital role in the development of contemporary Chinese painting in the 1980s and 1990s in all of its aspects, but primarily in abstract ink painting. After the relaxing of political tension and the reestablishment of mutual contacts with mainland China from the end of the 1970s, the artistic activities of prominent painters living in these regions began to significantly influence the artistic movement in mainland China, especially the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash.

Taiwan and Hong Kong have a special relationship with China. They are culturally intimately interconnected and despite their different historical circumstances in recent history, have a lot in common. Chinese people have settled there and as well as the political context – Hong Kong used to be a colony of Great Britain until 1997 – it still retains a specific position, not only politically but also culturally, even after its re-attachment to China. Taiwan is the successor to the Guomindang Republic of China and its relationship to China is controversial – they are based on the same tradition that developed in different ways in mainland China. It is these cultural similarities as well as the differences that create the various distinct identities in these Chinese territories.

The different historical circumstances in these regions meant that there were no periods as dramatically unfavourable as there were in mainland China. The political situation did not lead to a break with Chinese tradition such as mainland China had to face in the late 1970s. That is one of the main reasons why artists from the People's Republic of China have often

watched the artistic trends in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Similar parallels can be seen also in their poetry.

Hong Kong and Taiwan have consistently maintained close contact in the arts. That is the reason why it is difficult to categorise artists as Hong Kongese or Taiwanese, because many of them have spent part of their lives in both of these territories. Regardless of how the situations of Taiwan and Hong Kong differ from that of China, their cultural worlds derive from the same source, meaning that their art and lifestyles draw on the same cultural background as mainland China.

The main focus here is on the older generation of artists residing in these regions and who have had and still have considerable influence both on contemporary Chinese art and on the perception of abstract painting as a whole, especially for those painters involved in ink painting. This choice is justified by the fact that the works of artists who came to the forefront in the sixties and eighties significantly influenced the movement of abstract art, especially in painting. So far there is not enough relevant material available about Taiwan's most up-and-coming art movements, and incomplete information concerning Taiwan's return to Chinese administration, the distinctions have been blurred, and artists living in China have become more aware of Taiwanese abstract ink painting exhibitions. Although there are still differences between the perception of art and the acceptance of contemporary trends in Hong Kong society and the support for contemporary art is considerably stronger, the distinctions are in decline.

Although the subject of this book is abstract ink art, the most significant abstract and semi-abstract artists from Hong Kong and Taiwan mentioned here do not restrict themselves to one medium. Feng Zhongrui claimed that the medium should not restrict painting, and that it is not vital which medium the artist uses.[103] This starting point is entirely different from the beginnings of Experimental Ink and Wash in mainland China. Abstract painting from Taiwan and Hong Kong profoundly influenced all Chinese artists devoting themselves to ink painting, which is the reason why artists creating oil paintings are mentioned as well.

During the process of writing and after numerous interactions with Chinese artists, especially those whose abstract paintings have strong calligraphic features, another source of inspiration emerged, namely Japanese

[103] See: Interview of Fong Chung-Ray (French subtitles) / 藝術家馮鐘睿訪談 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXNl_w_hIPo, last retrieved 27 July 2019.

Liu Guosong. *Composition*, 1968, ink painting, Museum Rietberg, Zürich

avant-garde calligraphy, which started to be popular in Japan during the 1950s.

The idea of avant-garde calligraphy is to deviate from the traditional approach to writing according to rules defined by and learnt through studying and copying ancient styles, and suggests a much freer and less restrained way of expressing oneself through creating an "image of ink" (*bokushou* 墨象). In other words, *zenei shodou* ought to overcome any barriers of time, space and aesthetics, and unleash the most subconscious and abstract feelings or spiritual states of the moment. In this conception, the "image of ink" (which in a way is an alternative name for avant-garde *shodo*) is closely related to the abstract painting of the 20th century and may seem slightly ahead of its time (especially in the rigid world of traditional calligraphy).[104]

II.1. The development of abstract ink painting in Taiwan

The Chinese (and the majority in Taiwan) characterise their national identity as based on a continuous and homogenous civilization that has lasted for more than five thousand years and consider other nations as culturally less important. The situation in Taiwan has been even more specif-

[104] "Avant-garde Japanese calligraphy (前衛書道, zenei shodou)", *Avant-Garde Calligraphy*, http://www.beyondcalligraphy.com/avant-garde_calligraphy.html, last retrieved 20 December 2019.

ic.[105] Historical events have directly influenced the cultural development of Taiwan. By the end of the 19th century, it was under Chinese administration, and its contacts with the Mainland concerned mostly the surrounding regions, such as Fujian and Guangdong, being removed from the centre of the latest artistic trends. The Lingnan school of painting at the end of the 19th century displayed strong regional features, as is evident from its name (*lingnan* literally means by the south of the mountains, which indicates its distant position from the rest of China).

The subsequent occupation of the island by the Japanese (1885-1945) was beneficial from the point of view of its artistic development. It brought new trends to the region, mostly influenced by Western art, as contemporary trends dramatically influenced Japanese art in the West. After the beginning of anti-Western propaganda in the 30s, the influence of Western art decreased, and Taiwan lost its connection with modern Western art.[106] During the Japanese occupation, many young artists from Taiwan studied art in Japan, where they came into contact with European art movements. After the rise of Japanese nationalism and the breakdown of Japanese cultural contacts with the West in the 1930s, artists living in Taiwan went into cultural isolation, which ended when Taiwan returned to Chinese administration. The main development of the region began only after 1949. Cultural life was dramatically enriched as a result of a number of painters who came to Taiwan from mainland China after the Guomindang's defeat by the Communists.

Taiwanese cultural identity was built on the feeling of being Chinese. There is a considerable influence of Western Modernism in the visual arts, as well as in literature. Though the political situation in Taiwan was far from free, at least artists living there were not as isolated from international cultural trends as was the case in mainland China. In Taiwan, unlike mainland China, the connection with the Chinese legacy has never been broken in such a violent and radical way as happened during the Cultural Revolution. Some contacts with Western culture and artistic movements in

[105] Benická, Jana. "Taiwanci, Japonci alebo Číňania? O taiwanskej spoločnosti počas japonskej okupácie očami spisovateľa Wu Zhuoliua 吴濁流 (1900 – 1976) [The Taiwanese, Japanese or Chinese? On Taiwanese Society during the Japanese Occupation As Seen by the Writer Wu Zhuoliua]". *Studia Orientalia Slovaca*, 2005, Vol. IV, pp. 126–127.

[106] Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*. University of California Press, 1996. pp. 178 – 179 (abbreviated).

the visual arts or poetry, such as are Surrealism, Modernism, and others, were not interrupted.

Academies and universities, such as Taiwan Pedagogical University, Art Academy, Literary University, Donghai University and others played an essential role in the development of painting in Taiwan. These institutions have educated a generation of Taiwanese painters.[107] The situation in Taiwan has been much more favourable to traditional artists, especially those who came from the mainland. Compared to Hong Kong, the development of contemporary art in Taiwan has been affected by a less favourable political situation.

In the mid-1950s, an avant-garde artistic movement was formed in Taiwan. Taiwan's artists are still discussing the success or failure of this movement. Between 1956 and 1957, more than ten modern painting associations were formed in Taiwan. The most important of these are the Orient Painting Association,[108]the Fifth Moon Group,[109] the Four Seas Painting Association[110] and others.[111] One of the most significant was the Fifth Moon.

The first exhibition manifesting the new trends was mounted in 1951 by three artists who had been associated with the Hangzhou Academy: Li Zhongsheng (1912-1984), Zhu Dequn (Chu Teh-chun, 1920－2014), who in 1955 settled in Paris and Zhao Chunxiang (Chao Chung-hsiang, 1910－1991) who in 1956 went to Spain and to New York where he was inspired by the work of Kline and Rauschenberg. In 1956, a group of young artists formed the Fifth Moon Group and Liu Guosong became a dominant personality. They tried to create a new Chinese painting style that would respond to the challenge of Western modernism. They were not restricted by medium or technique. There is no doubt that it was Abstract expressionism that helped these artists to discover in their own traditional art the essence of form and the vital line, and to infuse them with a feeling for nature that is also intensely Chinese. The importance of this Taipei movement cannot be overestimated for it has become one of the cornerstones of

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107 Wu Bunai吳步乃. "Taiwan shuimo hua gaimao臺灣水墨畫概貌 [Overview of Ink Painting in Taiwan]". *Zhongguo shu hua*, no. 29, 1989, p. 2, (abbreviated), p. 2.

108 *Dongfang huahui*東方畫會.

109 Wu Yue huahui五月畫會.

110 Sihai huahui 四海畫會.

111 Wu Bunai吳步乃. "Taiwan shuimo hua gaimao臺灣水墨畫概貌 [Overview of Ink Painting in Taiwan]". *Zhongguo shu hua*, no. 29, 1989, (abbreviated), p. 2.

Liu Guosong. *Sprinkling Sounds of the Mountains*, 1977, ink painting on paper

contemporary Chinese art and since the Beijing Spring it had an impact on art in the PRC, especially after Liu Guosong's exhibition in February 1983 in the China Art Gallery.[112] Xiao Qin (b. 1935), Chen Daoming (b. 1931), and others were also connected with the Fifth Moon movement.

Liu Guosong 劉國松 (Liu Kuo-sung 1932) is identified as the pioneer of modern Taiwanese painting. He has practised Chinese painting since his childhood, and later he started to study Western techniques. He graduated from the Pedagogical University in Taiwan in 1956, and then he taught at several universities in Hong Kong, and the USA. In 1958, he founded the Association of Chinese Ink Painters. He has received many international awards, had more than eighty solo exhibitions worldwide, and has participated in more than seventy major international exhibitions.[113]

Liu started to experiment with Chinese and Western styles in 1958 – 59, influenced by Cézanne, Klee, and Picasso. He painted on plaster laid over

[112] Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*. University of California Press, 1996. p. 182.

[113] "Liu Guosong yishu 劉國松藝術 [Liu Guosong's art]", *Zhongguo shuhua*, no. 29, 1989, p. 17.

a canvas, scratching the surface or dripping ink like Pollock. It was an exhibition of paintings from the Palace Museum on their return to Taiwan after a triumphant tour of the United States that gave him his first encounter with ancient Chinese masterpieces and persuaded him to abandon oils for Chinese ink and brush.[114] Liu developed special paper made from cotton and other fibres and invented new techniques for creating unusual effects, including painting large areas of the paper and then pulling off fibres, leaving uneven white lines creating random patterns across the surface.[115] Liu Guosong's semi-abstract ink landscapes are a beautiful example of this synthesis of Western modernism and Chinese tradition.

After switching from Western oil painting to ink painting, he began to strive for different uses of the brush as is typical in traditional Chinese ink painting, and he started developing techniques such as collages, sprays and others. His paintings are sometimes called "space painting". Liu Guosong plays with the delicate, wash-out nuances of the ink surfaces; sometimes, we can identify the remnants of reality in his works, especially indistinct landscapes. The colours are sometimes soft, sometimes intense. Liu Guosong is one of the most distinguished individuals among abstract and semi-abstract artists in Taiwan. His work has had and still has a tremendous impact on the current movement of abstract ink art painters.

Other early Fifth Moon painters included Han Xiangning (b. 1939) and Zhuang Zhe (b. 1934), whose Kline-like brush strokes with Chinese ink were particularly powerful and expressive.[116] Han Xianning's style of painting is exceptionally diverse; the scale of his artworks varies from realistic pictures of redfish and buildings, sometimes combined with abstract brushstrokes, through postmodernist references to ancient ink paintings, where he uses the shapes of famous Chinese paintings, for example, *Travelling amid Mountains and Gorges* by Fan Kuan (c. 960 – c. 1030) and filling it in with different structures or Chinese characters, turning it into an abstract ink painting.[117] Zhuang Zhe is one of the pioneers of abstract ink

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114 Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*. University of California Press, 1996, p. 182.

115 Chang Arnold. "Tradition in the Modern Period". Kao, Mei-ch'ing. *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*. Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 27.

116 Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*. University of California Press, 1996, p. 183 (abbreviated).

117 For more of his works see following webpages: "Han Xiangning – Shuimo fei Shuimo 韓湘寧-雨水非水墨–4." [Han Xiangning – Ink Art or not Ink Art 4], Feichi zhong

painting in Taiwan. His works are colourful and use sharp lines inspired by the ones typical of bird and flower painting.

One member of the Fifth Moon group is Chen Tingshi 陳庭詩 (1913 – 2002). His abstract and semi-abstract works are a fusion between East and West. "His monumental woodcuts are often charged with a kind of primordial strength and silent presence, created by empty spaces punctuated by large solid blocks of colour or ink, juxtaposed against each other. His style has been inspired by Abstract expressionism in the West, but at the same time is reminiscent of the ancient art of calligraphy, rubbing and engraving."[118]

In 1956, Don Fan or Dongfang huazhan, (Eastern painting exhibition) was founded. They were forbidden by the police to form a society; they could exist only as an organization for putting on exhibitions. Most of the members came from the mainland, Li Yuanjia (b. 1932), Xiao Qin, Wu Hao (b. 1931) and others. One of them, Qin Song (b. 1932) initially painted traditional Chinese paintings, and later became an abstract painter. He was influenced by Klee, but incorporating, as did so many others, formalised ideographs in his powerful compositions. From the start, the Don Fan group was international, holding exhibitions simultaneously in Taipei and Barcelona and exhibiting in company with Spanish and West German painters. Their aims were to be a part of the world movement of modern art.[119]

The coming of modernism has shown a new path for artists living in Taiwan; the painters in their work have experimented with content and form. Naturally, this fact has dramatically enriched the face of painting with ink, and it is worthwhile exploring modernism in depth. Artists explored new paths in art, encouraged by the direction taken by Western art, to try to create something new and Chinese at the same time. That was the way the works of artists such as Liu Guosong, Feng Zhongrui, Huang Chaohu, Hong Genshen (b. 1946), and many others were created. The painter, calligrapher and contemporary poet Chu Ge (civil name Yuan Dexing, 1931

yishu wang, artemperor.tw/artworks/30491, or "Ru fu ru nü – Han Xiangning, Han Yi zhan 如父如女-韩湘宁、韩仪展. [Like Father, like Woman – Han Xiangning and Han Yi]". Shouye, www.mask9.com/node/180922., last retrieved 22 January 2020.

[118] Fu Martha Su. "Chinese Painting in Taiwan". Kao, Mei-ch'ing. *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*. Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 198.

[119] Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*. University of California Press, 1996. pp.184-185 (abbreviated).

-2011)[120], the semi-abstract painter Guan Zhizhong, Li Zuyuan (b. 1938), Xu Shuxiu (b. 1927) and other artists were also quite active.

Huang Chaohu's黄朝湖 (b. 1939) ink paintings have an abstract touch. In some works, the landscape is still discernible; elsewhere the sense of scenery is wholly lost in geometric surfaces and wild lines. He uses ink generously, with all its rich effects created on the highly absorbent multi-layer Chinese *xuanzhi* 宣紙paper. In his paintings, we see whole layered surfaces of various shades of ink with light admixtures of subtle shades of yellow, blue and other colours.

In addition to his artistic activities, Huang Chaohu was also involved in the field of culture. He published an art magazine and art books, had a gallery and founded several painting companies. For more than twenty years, he has been actively involved in the modern painting movement, leading and organizing. His works are not bound by traditional techniques, but have a surrealistic and magical flavour.

The prominent abstract painter Feng Zhongrui 馮鐘睿 (Fong Chung-Ray, b. 1933) moved to Taiwan in 1949, where he worked in the armed forces as a naval officer. Together with Hu Qizhong (Hu Chichung, 1927 – 2012) and other friends from the army, he was a founder member of the Four Seas Painting Association in 1957. In 1961 he joined the Fifth Moon Group. In 1975 he left for the USA. He admired the New York school of Abstract expressionism, especially some painters who were influenced by Eastern art. In his early works, he used calligraphy, but as he claimed, calligraphy did not have a significant influence on his style; he was using it for compositional reasons only.[121] His works are on display in many galleries round the world, such as the Galerie du Monde in Hong Kong.[122]

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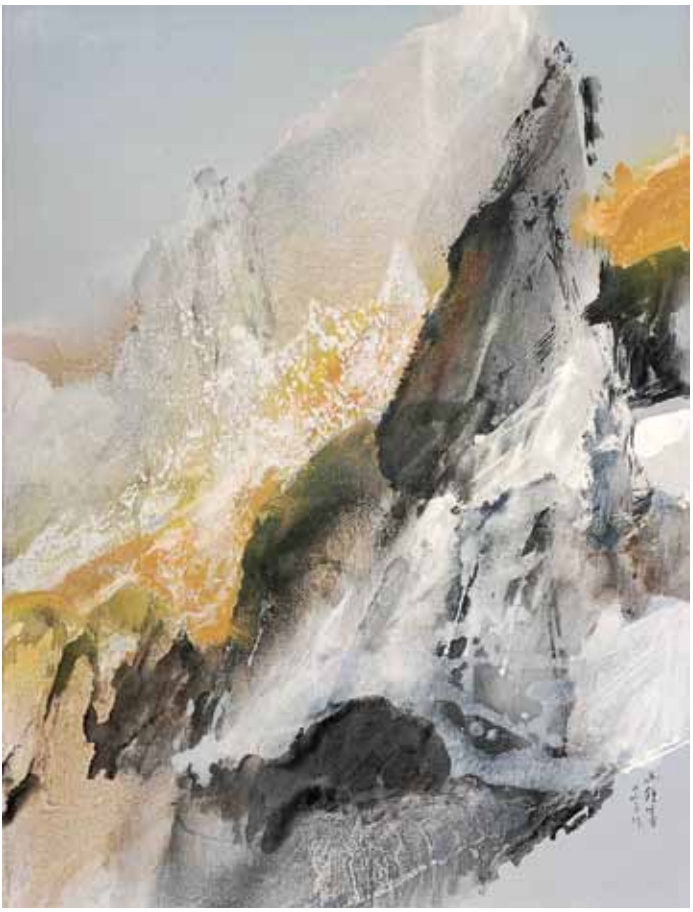
120 http://ueren.com/Person/Info/6051, last retrieved 20 January 2020.

121 Gu Pan顧盼. "【 雅昌專訪】Feng Zhongrui: Yige yishujia de fengge yu sheng ju laide馮鐘睿：一個藝術家的風格是與生俱來的[Feng Zhongrui: An artist's style is inborn] (an interview with the artist)." 【雅昌專訪】, 馮鐘睿：一個藝術家的風格是與生俱來的_新聞_雅昌新聞news.artron.net/20160518/n838035_2.html, last retrieved 20 January 2020.

122 "Fong Chung-Ray 馮鍾睿." *Galerie Du Monde*, galeriedumonde.com/artists/40-fong-chung-ray/, last retrieved 20 January 2020.



Feng Zhongrui. *Work 1982-73*, 1982, acrylic on canvas[123]

His works are based on tradition, despite the artist's efforts to create contemporary works of art and the use of new tools and techniques; he sought a new direction in the development of Chinese painting.[124] The works of this artist also belong to abstract ink painting. His painting *Work 1982-32*[125], is bathed in a bright-blue tone using several flickering ink lines.

[123] By courtesy of the Galerie du Monde.

[124] *China: Modernity and Art and Discussion of Modern Art in Japan and Korea*, International Conference, Taipei, 1991, p. 124.

[125] The photography of the painting was provided by the Galerie du Monde.

Blue overlaps with ink in places, creating hazy effects. Although it is an abstract work, the influence of the tradition of ancient ink painting is apparent. This painting is inspired equally by Chinese culture as by the Western modernist art movement. It is a beautiful synthesis of Western and Eastern art styles, past and present. Despite Feng denying the direct influence of calligraphy, he sometimes uses broad, generous brushstrokes with a half-dry brush (bones) in some of his ink and acrylic paintings, uses calligraphy in his paintings or writes calligraphic inscriptions on the abstract surfaces with the feeling of Informalism.

Feng Zhongrui. *Work 1989-32*, 1989, acrylic on canvas[126]

According to Wu Bunai, at that period young painters would adopt contemporary, modern views; it was very natural to combine the traditional Chinese painting techniques of the *literati*, such as throwing ink, splashes, with the world movement of Abstract expressionism. In their exploration of symbols and depictions, their works turned into something that was

[126] By courtesy of the Galerie du Monde.

no longer classic Chinese landscape painting but took on a new fantastic shape, similar to or different from natural forms. This art style was called abstract ink painting (*chouxiang shiumo* 抽象水墨) or ink painting with Chan ideas (*chanyi shuimo* 禪意水墨).[127]

Modern painting associations in Taiwan have sought above all to reform traditional painting by adopting and trying to absorb the Western culture, with the intention of expressing and finding a personal, individual style, to reveal the desires of the modern person. These movements have received encouragement from world exhibitions. At that time, modern painting absorbed the latest painting styles, such as Abstract expressionism, which Taiwanese painters combined with traditional Chinese ink painting.

The attitude of the Taiwanese establishment towards the modernists from the 1950s to the end of the 1960s was quite hostile. Although the situation in Taiwan was much less dramatic than in China, which was in the throes of the Cultural Revolution, artists who worked differently from the tradition were not at all welcome. Avant-garde artists were often attacked in the press, unable to work as art teachers while some painters or writers were persecuted or imprisoned.

Guan Zhizhong 管執中（Kuan Chih-chung, b. 1931), a native of Henan province, who settled in Taiwan in 1949, is one of the most significant Taiwanese painters practising abstract art. Between 1978 and 1980, he joined the experimental ink movement. Since 1980 he has organised several solo exhibitions in Taipei and Southeast Asia. He participated in several group exhibitions in Taipei, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, and in 1981 he founded the Association of International Modern Ink Painting. His works are understood as abstract but full of natural colours; they embody the spirit of the East.[128] Guan Zhizhong's semi-abstract, misty, vague lands are immersed in silence, creating calm, meditative impression. The feeling of the landscape or scenery is only lightly indicated; very often it almost disappears in strong calligraphic abstract brush strokes.

[127] Wu Bunai 吳步乃. "Taiwan shuimo hua gaimao 臺灣水墨畫概貌 [Overview of Ink Painting in Taiwan]". *Zhongguo shu hua*, no. 29, 1989, p. 2, (abbreviated).

[128] *China: Modernity and Art and Discussion of Modern Art in Japan and Korea*, International Conference, Taipei, 1991, p. 123.

Feng Zhongrui. *Work 1967-76*, 1967, ink and acrylic on canvas[129]

[129] By courtesy of the Galerie du Monde.

Zeng Peiyao 曾培堯(1927-1991)[130] started to create abstract ink paintings in his abstract expressionist period (1955-1961). His works are characterised by a calligraphic tendency, reminiscent of the illegible *kuang-cao* calligraphy.[131] However, upon closer inspection, it may be noted that, although compositionally reminiscent of calligraphic gestures, they have been produced differently, revealing imperfections such as fingerprints, lines created by blowing the ink, as well as other elements that distinguish these works from traditional calligraphy.

Between 1967 and 1980, the decline of modernism was followed by a return to more traditional styles, represented by the movement Searching for the Roots, which diverted the attention of artists and public away from the world's modern trends back to the Chinese tradition. After 1980, the revival of the avant-garde movement started, and this development continued until the end of the 1980s. According to Marta Su Fu:

> Artists in Taiwan today face problems which are common to Chinese artists in mainland China, Hong Kong and other parts of the world. Nevertheless, the Chinese artist in Taiwan also has considerable advantages over his counterpart in mainland China and elsewhere. Because of the relatively stable situation in Taiwan and its economic prosperity, he operates in more favourable conditions, in which more opportunities are available, and greater freedom is enjoyed in the pursuit of his goals. His choice of subject matter, style or media is entirely his own. Parallel with the openness of artistic expression in Taiwan is a steady increase of artistic activities, as evident by the growth of local cultural centres built by the government, at regional and municipal levels, throughout the country. The private sector has responded with a flourish of art galleries, many of which have been founded at the end of the 1980s.[132]

Of course, all these advantages are relative, Sullivan's opinion is much less optimistic:

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[130] For further information see: Zeng Peiyao曾培堯. Retrieved from http://www.nan.com.tw/search2.asp?timg=shopbg.jpg&do=painter&param=1152, last retrieved 20 January 2020.

[131] His painting is available in TFAM museum, online access: ZhongShan North Road Section. "Home: Collections: TFAM Collections: Life-8326." *TFAM*, www.tfam.museum/Collection/CollectionDetail.aspx?CID=419&ddlLang=en-us. Last retrieved 22 January 2020.

[132] Fu Martha Su, *Chinese Painting in Taiwan*, in Kao Maysching (editor). *Twentieth-century Chinese Painting*, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 196.

> Yet by the late 1980s, the art world of Taipei was not in a healthy state. In this intensely materialistic society, works of art were seen by the new class of entrepreneurs as marks of status, commodities, safe investments. As for the artists themselves, with few exceptions, the search for national identity through art seems to have been forgotten in a crude scramble for wealth and fame. In no other society in East Asia was art so debased. [133]

Nevertheless, we should not forget that the same problem of sudden commercialisation happened later, after the 1990s, in mainland China, too, and today affects perhaps even more severely artistic life in the PRC.

II. 2. Abstract painting in Hong Kong

The visual arts in Hong Kong developed at the beginning of the twentieth century in the context of the Hong Kong – Macau – Guangzhou region, with the centre of the area being Guangzhou. The region was less developed in terms of the fine arts than other areas with a long cultural tradition.

With the huge influx of immigrants from mainland China during the late 1940s, Hong Kong underwent rapid social and economic change and soon acquired the status of an important international city. The art scene absorbed some of the better-known artists from Guangzhou and even further north, who took up permanent residence here after the War.[134] Hong Kong has become an essential place for the development of modern Chinese painting and one of the places where avant-garde movements made abstract painting stand out.

Unlike Taiwan, the modernist movement in Hong Kong was not obstructed by political pressure but it was basically supported. It is possible that the generous support from the official authorities has caused the diversity of its art, as well as the relatively large internationality of artistic movements and individual artists.

The source of modern ink painting in Hong Kong is deeply rooted in Chinese tradition. The main feature of the Chinese painting tradition con-

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[133] Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*. University of California Press, 1996. p. 188.

[134] Wong, Wucius. "Chinese Painting in Hong Kong". Kao, Mei-ch'ing. *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*. Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 211.

Wang Wuxie. *Quiet and Secluded (scenery),* 1978, ink on paper

sists of two parts. One includes the tools used in painting, while the other contains the artists' views and spirit of Chinese painting.[135] The tools used in traditional art have changed very little over a thousand years; it is still the same brush, ink, silk, paper and mineral colours. However, ideologically, the ways of thinking were subject to change as the historical and social situation changed. Especially nowadays, when the contacts between Western and Eastern culture are so close, the concept of ink painting and the ideas that modern ink painting expresses are undergoing significant changes.

There have been underlying elements of abstraction in Chinese painting for a long time in its splendid art history. Under the influence of Western art, an abstract movement started to emerge in Hong Kong. After some time, certain artists did not dare to walk this path or no longer wanted to imitate Euro-American painting forms. They tried to find and rebuild the concept of tradition in Chinese painting from the roots of traditional painting and how it could be interconnected with contemporary art trends.

Some artists were using oil colours coming from the West, which in Chinese eyes meant much more than just the medium. According to a couple of critics, it cut them off from tradition, and had an appeal more towards the artists living in mainland China. It is obvious that the situation outside mainland China is different, which appeals more to Hong Kong than to Taiwan. Some artists started to experiment with ink, and their achievements brought new trends into Chinese painting in mainland China, which had been frozen in tradition.

By the end of 1950, Hong Kong's first wave of modernists began and led to the creation of the Society of Hong Kong Artists, which included Chinese and non-Chinese artists. Although the Society existed for only

[135] Deng Haichao 鄭海潮. "Xianggang yishu gaishuo 香港藝術概說 [On Hong Kong's art]". *Meishu*, no. 12, 1997, p. 64.

a short period, approximately two years, and held only two joint exhibitions, its members were the first avant-garde artists in Hong Kong. Its members included Douglas Bland (1923-1975), Kuang Yaoding (Kwong Yeu-Ting, 1922-2011)[136] and Lü Shoukun, each of whom had a significant influence on art long after the collapse of the society.

Although at the beginning, modern ink painting in Hong Kong was subject to attack from conservative painters of traditional Chinese paintings, artists connected to the modernist movement, such as abstract painting, did not feel any pressure from the government; on the contrary, their art was supported by the Hong Kong administration. That gave a positive impetus to the development of art in Hong Kong resulting in the establishment of various art societies which organised exhibitions.

Douglas Bland was British, probably the only non-Chinese artist in Hong Kong whose work contained strong East-Asian elements. He was an ardent admirer of Zhao Wuji (Zao Wou-Ki, 1921 – 2013), who was in Hong Kong for about six months in 1958; under his influence Bland developed a keen interest in archaic Chinese scripts and images of Chinese origin, which were integrated into his abstract oil painting.[137] His abstract paintings represent the opposite attitude to Chinese art. It is a point of view that is more common; the perspective used by many Western abstract artists, from Tobey, Mathieu to Tàpies, who have drawn inspiration from the Chinese cultural atmosphere, whether it be traditional ink painting or calligraphy.

The 1960s, which Wucius Wong has described as a "heroic period in Hong Kong art" began with the *Sixth Hong Kong Art Festival Exhibition* and the first exhibition of the *Hong Kong International Salon of Painting*. The international artists participating in these exhibitions included Chen Tingshi, Feng Zhongrui and Liu Guosong from Taiwan, Zhong Sibin (1917-1983) from Singapore, Zhao Wuji and the others. The works of Wu Puhui (Pansy Ng, 1937), and Lü Shoukun, were strongly influenced by Abstract expressionism, especially by Pollock, Kline, the Tachists, and Zhao Wuji, who spent six months in Hong Kong in 1958.[138]

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[136] Yeung Choi-kit Sabrina. "Avant-garde Art Discourse in Hong Kong's Modernist Art and Literary Publications in the 1950s and 1960s," *Hong Kong Visual Art Yearbook*, 2019, pp. 151-191.

[137] Wong, Wucius. "Chinese Painting in Hong Kong". Kao, Mei-ch'ing. *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*. Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 215 (abbreviated).

[138] Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*. University of California Press, 1996, p. 193.

The sixties were a period of significant development in Hong Kong art, especially for abstract or semi-abstract painting. Many art associations were established at that time. The influence of Abstract expressionism was increasingly apparent in visual art, which, to a certain extent, corresponded to some aspects of Chinese painting. After all, several artists from the abstract expressionist movement drew inspiration from East Asian art. A group of artists, including the famous painter Lü Shoukun, was concentrated around the Modern Literature and Art Association founded in 1958. The organization held a number of exhibitions.[139]

Feeling the need for a body more sharply focused on contemporary art, artists around the Modern Literature and Art Association and some of their friends founded the Circle Group in 1964. For several years this group included most of the progressive painters and sculptors in Hong Kong.[140] The Circle Group represented the side of Hong Kong art in search of new visions within the context of contemporary art developments in the West. Most of the Group's members, however, were deeply aware of the riches inherited from their Oriental past.[141] Whatever the techniques they used, their works present the synthesis of the Western modernism, especially Abstract expressionism and Chinese cultural heritage.

Far from cutting the artist's ties with the Chinese tradition, this importation strengthened them, because it brought about both a complete break with the art of the recent past and a search for the calligraphic roots of Chinese pictorial art. Abstract expressionism also stimulated artists to experiment with the very language of Chinese painting itself, while at the same time, it made them feel that they were becoming part of a worldwide movement in contemporary art.[142]

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[139] Wen Lou 文樓. "Cong wenhua beijing kan Xianggang xiandai yishu fazhang 從文化背景看香港現代藝術發展", *Meishu*, no. 12, 1997, pp. 57-50.

[140] Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*. University of California Press, 1996, p. 193 (abbreviated).

[141] Wong, Wucius. "Chinese Painting in Hong Kong". Kao, Mei-ch'ing. *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*. Oxford University Press, 1988, 215 (abbreviated).

[142] Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*. University of California Press, 1996. pp. 192 – 193. For more about the painter see: Zhang Yameng 張亞萌 . "Yong bu beiqi chuantong, yong bu fangqi gaige 永不背棄傳統 永不放棄改革 [Never Abandon Tradition, Never Abandon Reform]". Zhongguo yishu bao, 4 April 2018, online access: 104346. "中國作家協會主辦." 永不背棄傳統 永不放棄改革--藝術--中國作家網, www.chinawriter.com.cn/n1/2018/0404/c404004-29907891.html, last retrieved 28 July 2019.

Lü Shoukun, *Free and Unrestrained Zhuangzi*, 1974, ink on paper

Lü Shoukun 呂壽琨 (Lui Show-Kwan, 1919-1976) became the leading figure in modern ink painting in Hong Kong at the end of the 1960s. He was born in Guangzhou, graduated in economics from Guangzhou University and settled in Hong Kong in 1948. He studied painting and after a period of doing oil paintings he turned his attention to ink painting. He was active in many art associations at that time: he founded the Chinese Art Club and the Seven Artists Club. In 1968 he formed In Tao Art Association (Yuan Dao).

In the 1960s, Lü Shoukun started to teach at the University of Chinese Language and Literature in Hong Kong. The subject he taught was the experimental study of Chinese painting. In this way, he fostered the talents of ink painters and under his influence a new artistic current began to form.[143] The research in ink painting, which was started by him, favoured the reform of traditional Chinese painting, which was based on copying and imitating the ancient masters. What he sought was not reform in the tools and materials of painting or inevitable changes in the technique of painting; he wanted to change artists' opinions and their attitude to the creative process. He and many of his students did not seek to reject the technique of ink and brush completely, but continued to use them whilst trying to reform Chinese ink painting. The goal he pursued in his research was to discover a real spirit of tradition. Under his influence, young ink painters experimented with new methods of painting. They were searching for reform in ink painting, exploring new issues from multiple sources. Some were based on Western abstract techniques, which they used experimentally on Chinese paper, in an attempt to create a modern language for Chinese ink painting.

At that time, Lü Shoukun created his Chan paintings, *chan hua* 禪 畫, which he painted and coloured with a broad flat brush.[144] He experimented and created widely, was active in the field of art theory and it was he who started the movement of ink painting in Hong Kong, which opened up new ways not only because of the materials used but also in the presentation and content. In some of his works, he was inspired by ancient Chinese Daoist philosophy. On his painting *Free and Unrestrained Zhuangzi* there is a quote from Zhuangzi's famous story about his dream with butterfly. As a teacher, he had an immense influence on the whole new generation of artists. His students later formed the One Art Society (*Yihua hui*一畫會). Lu Shoukun's semi-abstract paintings present almost indistinctive landscapes and flowers, lost in his bold wet brush strokes, only the composition and the occasional calligraphic seal inscriptions remind us of traces of the tradition.

[143] Jian Zhixiong簡誌雄. "Xianggang de xiandai shuimo hua香港的現在書畫". *Zhongguo shu hua*, no. 29, 1989, p. 19.

[144] "Lui Shou-Kwan." *Alisan Fine Arts*, 2019, www.alisan.com.hk/en/artists_detail.php?id=3, last retrieved 27 July 2019.

A significant number of the paintings made by Han Zhixun韓誌勛 (1922 – 2019)[145] are abstract without a hint of the real shape of the landscape. Although he was using completely new techniques and media that came from the West, his work also draws on the tradition of meditative Chan Buddhist paintings. In the words of Wucius Wong:

Zhou Luyun *Tree 8*, 1970s, ink and colour on paper[146]

[145] For paintings by this artist see "Xianggang yishujia Han Zhixun shishi xiangnian 96 sui 香港藝術家韓志勳逝世享年96歲 [Hong Kong artist Han Zhixun passed away at the age of 96.]" *The Stand News*, 26 February 2019, https://thestandnews.com//art/香港藝術家韓志勳逝世-享年96歲 last retrieved 27 July 2019.

[146] By courtesy of the Galerie du Monde.

> Han Zhixun found his way to painting sprayed acrylic colours, expressing a meditative spirit tinged with a kind of cosmic dynamism and subtle sensuality, celebrating the image of the circle to the extent of making the personal mythical. [147]

One of the artists who discovered abstraction in their work is Ding Yanyong丁衍镛 (1902-1978), who settled in Hong Kong in 1949. After his arrival, he continued to develop his style. Although his most famous works are his figurative ink paintings, increasingly stylised motifs from the Beijing Opera, in the 1970s he also produced oil paintings, in which he started with abstraction. Later, some of his paintings were inspired by ancient seals and Western art movements. The oil painting *Composition* is abstract, and it shows clearly the influence of Western modernism rather than ancient Chinese tradition.

> During this period, his paintings in oil underwent a process of transformation, bringing the two different parallel lines of his development in Chinese and Western art closer to each other. His *Composition* of 1965 is a good example of his celebration of an intuitive and spontaneous line.[148]

Among the many artists active since the 1970s, the following students of Lü Shoukun deserve to be mentioned when it comes to abstract painting: Wang Wuxie, Xu Zixiong, Jin Daiqiang or Zhou Luyun.

The famous artist and art critic Wang Wuxie王無邪 (Wucius Wong, b. 1936) came to Hong Kong as a ten-year-old child. At fourteen, he began to study classical painting with Lü Shoukun. By the time he was nineteen, he became a co-publisher of an avant-garde poetry magazine; by the age of twenty-two, he was one of the founders of the Modern Literature and Art Association. He graduated from university in the United States and after working in the City Hall Museum and Art gallery, where he was in charge of modern art exhibitions, and teaching at the Polytechnic, he settled in the United States in 1984. His compositions became extraordinarily subtle and sophisticated as he broke the surface of the picture into flattened planes and

147 Wong, Wucius. "Chinese Painting in Hong Kong". Kao, Mei-ch'ing. *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*. Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 215.

148 Kao, Mei-ch'ing. "The Quest for New Art". Kao, Mei-ch'ing. *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*. Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 148. For the painting see p. 150.

facets, presenting a spatial ambiguity through a network of lines inspired initially by the cracks on Chinese porcelain. [149] Wang Wuxie is a painter and art theorist, the author of many books on Chinese painting, and contemporary Chinese art. His style is lyrical, sometimes colourful mostly by playing on shades of ink, creating a composition that seems more Western than Chinese, fully covering the surface with occasional slightly geometrical lines crossing through the paintings. In his painting shown here, the influence of ancient brushstrokes typical of *literati* painting is visible. He creates a lyrical abstract universe in using the elements of Chinese ancient landscape.

Zhou Luyun. *Untitled*, 1970s, ink and colour on paper[150]

[149] Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*. University of California Press, 1996, pp. 197-198 (abbreviated).

[150] By courtesy of the Galerie du Monde.

Xu Zixiong 徐子雄 (Chui Tze-hung, b. 1936) is a painter, writer and art theorist. His artworks consist of landscapes, abstract paintings and calligraphy, which are often surrounded by hard-edged abstract surfaces. His abstract paintings are full of harmonic colours, hard-edged geometrical shapes blending with gently expanding colourful surfaces, in which the ink is complemented by mineral tints, or is absent and replaced by colour flushes.[151] The painter and designer Jin Daiqiang introduced elements of graphic design into his minimalistic ink paintings.

In 1971, Liu Guosong, Fifth Moon's leading figure, arrived in Hong Kong. He taught at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Chinese Language in Hong Kong where he became a leading figure in ink painting. In 1977, he established the *Hong Kong Ink Painting Association*[152].

When we speak of abstract painting in Hong Kong, we cannot forget the influential painter Zhou Luyun 周綠雲 (Irene Chou 1924 – 2011). After graduating from university, she worked as a journalist. In 1949, she settled in Hong Kong, devoting herself to writing. In 1966, she studied painting with Lü Shoukun and started to create by herself. In 1968 she had her first exhibition in the Hong Kong Parliament, and became a member of the In Tao, One Art Group International Society of contemporary ink painting.[153] She had various exhibitions in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, the Philippines, Australia, Japan, the UK, the USA and in other countries. There is no hint of reality in her lyrical abstract painting, which often revisits the motif of a circle. The combination of huge generous brushstrokes in *xieyi* style is enriched with splashed dots of ink and subtle round plastic objects. Just like the other artists mentioned here, she does not avoid colours. In the painting *Impact A*, she combines yellow with ink brushstrokes. The work *Untitled* is monochrome, while in *Tree 8* there are plastic structures, which remind us of the elements found in nature, such as the moon or trees. Her artworks are on display

[151] See further in Xu Zixiong徐子雄, "Xianggang de xiandai shuimo hua 香港的現代水墨畫[Modern Ink Painting in Hong Kong]" *Zhongguo shu hua*. no. 29, 1989. See also. "Chui Tze-Hung." *Alisan Fine Arts*, 2020, www.alisan.com.hk/en/artists_detail.php?id=61, last retrieved 20 January 2020.

[152] (Xianggang xiandai shuimo hua xiehui香港現代水墨 協會).

[153] For more of her works see"Irene Chou." *Galerie Du Monde*, 15 Aug. 2019, galeriedumonde.com/news/50-irene-chou-asia-society-presents-a-world-within-the-art/.Last retrieved 28 January 2020. The images of Zhou Luyun's artworks are provided by Galerie du Monde.

in many galleries around the world, such as the Galerie du Monde, who provided the images published here.

The semiabstract painter Zhang Linglin 張玲麟 (b. 1933) began a career as an actress, but she started to paint in the 1960s, developing a specific style primarily based on *xieyi* painting and using aquarelle techniques to create a poetic vision of the Chinese landscape.[154] Another semiabstract painter, Jin Daiqiang靳埭強 (b. 1942), settled in Hong Kong in 1957 and in 1967 began studying ink painting under the direction of Lü Shoukun. In 1976, Jin joined the One Art Group (Yihua hui) in the Hong Kong Gallery. [155] His semiabstract paintings with a hint of design technique depict the moon, nature, and clusters of mountains that seem not to resemble the real world.

An artist who could be described as abstract is Liang Juting (Leung Kiu-ting梁巨廷b. 1945), who has been living in Hong Kong since 1948. He studied under Lü Shoukun, learning from his teacher's reformist spirit. The work of Liang Juting has evolved in different directions and it is diverse. The artist experimented with a variety of materials and techniques, including collage. He also designed and used some of his experience with two-dimensional imaging in painting. He has exhibited in Hong Kong, Taiwan, USA, Canada, and Southeast Asian countries. He spent the 1980s and 1990s travelling through China, the USA and Canada, observing nature and its transformations, gathering inspiration to raise the artistic level of his works. In the 1990s, he increasingly turned to ink painting, trying to express inner meaning, ideas (yi 意). This resulted in the transformation of dots, lines and contrasts between wet and dry ink and contrasts of black and white. In his works he created abstract visual shapes to elevate the painting to an even higher spiritual sphere by emphasizing the spirit of ink and brush. Combining the Chinese tradition of ink painting and the ideas of Western modernism in many experiments has produced his artistic style. Liang Juting, after intense searching, has discovered a new way to develop Hong Kong's contemporary ink painting.

The semi-abstract painter Gong Peiyun龔佩雲 (b. 1948) studied design and art in optional classes in 1970. Initially, he studied under Lü Shoukun

[154] Huang Zhuan黃專. "Zhang Linglin de yishu shengya張玲麟的藝術生涯." *Zhongguo shu hua*, no. 29, 1989, p. 32.

[155] "Jin Daiqiang zuopin靳埭强作品." *Zhongguo shu hua*, no. 29, 1989, p. 23.

and Wang Wuxie. He joined the *Visual Art Group*, *One Art Group*, and his works have been shown in exhibitions in Hong Kong and abroad.[156] His style is abstract but lyrical. In Gong Peiyun's works, there is often a motif of circles that fills the whole space. His paintings also draw inspiration from the world of design. Occasionally fragments of the landscape appear incorporated into an abstract composition, a structure reminiscent of the fold of a mountain, but the overall effect of his paintings remains mostly abstract.

Another abstract painter is Bi Zirong 畢 子 融 (b. 1949), who studied in 1971-1973 at the University of Hong Kong, where he followed art classes under the direction of Lü Shoukun and Wang Wuxie. In 1978, he went to the University of London and in 1983 he studied design and fine arts in New York. He has participated in many exhibitions in Hong Kong and abroad.[157] Bi Zirong uses charcoal for painting and dyeing. In his abstract painting, we can observe the structures reminiscent of tree bark, translated into misty lines, sometimes resembling an unreal dreamy landscape, which disappears on closer inspection. The composition of his paintings is fully covered in soft structures, shadows, faint elegant organic lines and shapes built on repeatedly appearing subtle brushstrokes or slight lines made by charcoal more than on powerful calligraphic lines.

Through the 1970s and the 1980s, the modern movements flourished in Hong Kong, unrestricted by anything similar to the conservative establishment that Taiwanese artists had to contend with. Indeed, every form of modernism was supported, while some artists moved back and forth between East and West. The *Hong Kong Art Festival* became an international event. In 1976, the Hong Kong Arts Centre was opened, and the city became host to the first Festival of Asian Arts. Between 1970 and 1979 the City Hall Museum and Art Gallery mounted five contemporary art biennales. New groups appeared, among them the Visual Art Society, founded by graduates in art and design from Hong Kong University extramural studies department; they were more concerned with modernism than with coming to terms with traditional techniques.[158] In the 1980s, some artists wanted to establish in Hong Kong an open and creative international art space, but they were facing a crisis because many talented people started to leave the city.

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156 "Gong Peiyun zoupin龔佩云作品". *Zhongguo shuhua*, no. 29, 1989, p. 10.

157 "Bi Zirong zuopin畢 子 融作品". *Zhongguo shuhua*, no. 29, 1989, p. 31.

158 Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*. University of California Press, 1996, pp. 194 – 195 (abbreviated).

Zhou Luyun. *Impact A*, 1970s, ink and colour on paper[159]

[159] By courtesy of the Galerie du Monde.

Even if some Hong Kong artists suffered from a lack of national identity, working in an atmosphere of greater freedom, they developed a creative energy quite as remarkable as that of Taiwanese artists. They played as well a crucial role as the chief transmitters of Chinese modernism to the People's Republic, where their influence was considerable.[160]

In the early 1980s, works by Taiwanese and Hong Kong artists began to appear in Chinese periodicals. The contacts between Taiwan and mainland China were gradually rebuilt.[161] Since then, Taiwanese and Hong Kong art have greatly influenced Chinese painters, especially those who chose Chinese ink for their medium. It may even be said that the movement of experimental ink painting, established by the 1980s to 1990s in the People's Republic of China, was directly influenced by the Taiwanese and Hong Kong modernist movements with which some artists maintained personal contacts.

The entry of modernism in Taiwan and Hong Kong has shown a new way for Chinese ink and wash painting not only in those regions, but has also heavily influenced ink painters in mainland China; the painters in their work have experimented with content and form. Naturally, this fact has dramatically enriched painting with ink, and it is exploring modernism in depth. The artists explored new ways in art, encouraged by the Western art movements and were trying to create something new and Chinese at the same time.

The art of Taiwan and Hong Kong has played an essential role in the development of art in China and not only in abstract painting. It can be assumed that since the late 1970s and early 1980s, works of artists published in magazines and later seen at exhibitions in China have become a bridge to Western modern art and at the same time a powerful impetus to modernise the artistic language of the middle and younger generations of Chinese artists. That was especially important for Chinese ink painting, which for a long time had been experiencing an identity crisis, on the one hand trying to preserve the best of Chinese tradition, but on the other hand striving for innovation as well as entry into world art. Although artists living in the PRC currently have many more opportunities to follow the latest

[160] Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*. University of California Press, 1996, p. 199.

[161] Deng Haichao鄭海潮. "Xianggang yishu gaishuo香港藝術概說", *Meishu*, no. 12, 1997, p. 63.

art trends in the world, at the beginning of the 80s in the twentieth century the art in these regions was one of the easiest ways for them to access new trends from abroad. Art in Taiwan and Hong Kong is still very close to the mainland, mostly due to the cultural affinity of these regions.

II. 3. Japanese avant-garde calligraphy as a source of inspiration for Chinese abstract ink painting

There is another source of inspiration that tends to be overlooked but which has influenced Chinese artists in a similar way to the ones mentioned above: Japanese experimental calligraphy. Japanese avant-garde calligraphy is a fascinating example of cross-cultural influences as a whole. The growth of traditional Japanese calligraphy, as well as its avant-garde form, was strongly influenced by traditional Chinese calligraphy, which has already been mentioned as a source of inspiration for contemporary abstract ink artists and Abstract calligraphy. Even more interesting is the fact that Japanese avant-garde calligraphy, which influenced contemporary Chinese artists, especially those doing abstract calligraphy, drew heavily on ancient Chinese theories mentioned in the previous chapter. It is intriguing to see the cross-cultural contacts between China and Japan. Several Chinese artists identified Japanese avant-garde calligraphy as something that had an essential impact on their work.

Japanese calligraphy, especially *kanji*, which unlike *kana* was based on Chinese characters, used to be practised by famous Chinese calligraphers and developed into a specific kind of art form. Despite the voices trying to deny the position of calligraphy, such as an oil painter named Koyama Shōtarō who wrote an essay in 1883 entitled "Sho wa bijutsu narazu" (Calligraphy is not art) claiming that 'Chinese characters (*kanji*) and Japanese syllabaries (*kana*) were the equivalents of the Western alphabet, merely symbols of a spoken language, and did not possess the same range of artistic potential as painting and sculpture'[162], calligraphy maintained its popularity, being both popular and high art. Japanese calligraphy was written by Zen (Chan) Buddhists, by poets and *literati* for writing their poems.

[162] Rosenfield, John M. "Western Style Painting." ed. Donald H. Shively (ed). *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture*, Princeton University Press, 1971, p. 209.

Inoue Yūichi. *Cedar 82024*, 1980, ink on paper[163]

The history of avant-garde calligraphy (zenei shodou前衛書道) began before World War II, although its radical form was pursued only after the war ended. This modernization was paradoxically calling for the return to the most ancient forms as practised by the Chinese calligraphers from the periods before the Tang dynasty. The calligraphic line, as defined by the avant-garde is based on the calligraphic theory of Lady Wei, which has been mentioned in the previous chapter.

Like everything new, experimental calligraphy in Japan had its roots in the past. A disciple of Kusakabe Meikaku named Hidai Tenrai (1872–1939) had been a student of the early Chinese styles based on the works brought to Japan by Yang Shoujing (1839 – 1915) in 1881, and in 1930 he formed an organi-

[163] By courtesy of Japan Art Galerie Friedrich Müller (C) UNAC TOKYO. Photo credit: Japan Art Galerie Friedrich Müller.

zation in order to publish some of these models. Three years later he formed the Calligraphic Art Association (Shodō Geijutsusha) with the aim of rethinking traditional values and incorporating some artistic ideas from the West.[164] He is commonly referred to as the Father of Modern Calligraphy in Japan. Hidai was sensitive to both the proper study of calligraphy directly from the Chinese classics and also to the developments in modern art in the West. The question of abstraction which dominated the thought of many Western artists this century found echoes in discussions about calligraphy in Japan and was manifest in modern calligraphic work after the Second World War.[165]

Avant-garde calligraphy is considered to have begun, properly speaking, in 1945. It was in that year that Hidai Nankoku (1912–1999), the son of Hidai Tenrai who had served in a government office during the war and then escaped to a mountain village, followed his father's dying wishes for him to return to the past while creating new forms. Nankoku was inspired by the Chinese character for "lightning" (*dian*電), and his calligraphic variations on this word, as well as other examples of what he called "heartline works," were exhibited in a modern art exhibition in 1946.[166]

The Mainichi Calligraphy exhibition formed a new section, 'New Trends in Calligraphy' or 'Shin Keiko no Sho' in 1951. The name was subsequently changed to 'Images in Ink Art', 'Bokushou Bijutsu' in 1954. This was further revised to 'Avant-garde Work','Zenei Sakuhin', and finally to 'Avant-garde Calligraphy','Zenei Sho', which is its name today. The latter revision is important as it indicates the calligrapher's understanding of the meaning of calligraphy. Abstract work is to be included in a definition of calligraphy, not just as an activity alongside it.[167] Some scholars have regarded Japanese avant-garde calligraphers as being "modernist,"

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164 Addiss, Stephen. "Japanese Calligraphy since 1868." Rimer, J. Thomas., and Toshiko M. McCallum. *Since Meiji: Perspectives on the Japanese Visual Arts, 1868-2000*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2012, p. 462.

165 Sato, Flint, Christine. "The Rise of Avant-garde Calligraphy in Japan." *Stendhal gallery*, http://stendhalgallery.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/SLcatmk2.pdf, last retrieved 21 January 2020.

166 Addiss, Stephen. "Japanese Calligraphy since 1868." Rimer, J. Thomas., and Toshiko M. McCallum. *Since Meiji: Perspectives on the Japanese Visual Arts, 1868-2000*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2012, p. 462.

167 Sato, Flint, Christine. "The Rise of Avant-garde Calligraphy in Japan." *Stendhal gallery*, http://stendhalgallery.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/SLcatmk2.pdf, last retrieved 21 January 2020.

because of their recognition of the independence of calligraphy and their interest in the medium in their painterly activities.[168]

Avant-garde calligraphy is, then, abstract work produced in the same way as a piece of calligraphy. It has a definite stroke order, a similar performance-style of execution and is often based on a character. The character is almost always so distorted as to be impossible to decipher. The title of the piece is often the character from which it is derived but not always. Another related art, *bokushou*, images in ink, is a freer form of expression. The piece is not usually based on a character, but is written in the same way as a piece of calligraphy. The title is usually freely chosen. Since the 1960s, *bokushou* has developed beyond the calligraphic limits and now encompasses more pictorial work by artists and not just calligraphers. A variety of techniques may be used, and there may be no definite stroke order. Calligraphers have used some of these techniques but always write the main form of the piece in a calligraphic form with a designated order of strokes. Avant-garde calligraphy is calligraphy by virtue of its methodology and style of production and by the definition of calligraphy as an art of the line.[169]

A significant influence on Japanese calligraphers was the development of abstract art in the West, especially the Abstract Expressionists in the United States and the Art Informel movement in Europe. Parallels were drawn with calligraphy, the emphasis of both art forms being on energetic brushwork and a performance style of execution. Avant-garde calligraphers took part in the 'Japanese and American Abstract Art Exhibition' in 1955 in the National Modern Art Museum in Tokyo. They participated in the Sao Paolo Biennale Exhibitions from 1956. Modern calligraphy was also exhibited in Baden Baden, Germany, in 1963 alongside work by Picasso and Miró.

One of these calligraphers is Inoue Yūichi (1916 – 1985). His experimental "one character writings," as well as his expressive, action-based style of painting, won him considerable acclaim both at home and abroad, with some even referring to him as the Jackson Pollock of Japan. [170] In the

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[168] Kenji Kajiya, Modernised Differently: Avant-Garde Calligraphy and Art in Postwar Japan. *M+Matters*, https://www.mplusmatters.hk/postwar/paper_topic2.php?l=en, last retrieved 22 January 2020.

[169] Sato, Flint, Christine. "The Rise of Avant-garde Calligraphy in Japan." *Stendhal gallery*, http://stendhalgallery.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/SLcatmk2.pdf, last retrieved 21 January 2020.

[170] Johnny. "The Single Character Action Calligraphy of Yuichi Inoue." *Spoon & Tamago*, 3 Oct. 2014, http://www.spoon-tamago.com/2013/09/05/the-single-character-action-calligraphy-of-yuichi-inoue/, last retrieved 22 January 2020.

1950s and 1960s, calligraphy from Japan was in the vanguard of international art, and Japanese avant-garde calligraphers successfully competed with European and American abstractionists for the attention of art critics and audiences worldwide.

Inoue Yūichi. *Shoku (to belong) 66102*, 1966, ink on paper[171]

Among them, the most remarkable and most truly indigenous is probably calligraphy which both in its traditional form as well as its modern version has an ever-increasing number of admirers both in Europe and America. It is of course well known that artists such as Klee, Miró, Tobey, and Kline were profoundly influenced by Oriental calligraphy and that modern Japanese calligraphers have in turn been significantly influenced by abstract painting, so that the influence is a two-way one which has been beneficial for both sides.[172] A prominent critic of abstract art, Michel Seuphor, wrote about Japanese calligraphy thus:

[171] By courtesy of Japan Art Galerie Friedrich Müller (C) UNAC TOKYO. Photo credit: Japan Art Galerie Friedrich Müller.

[172] Munsterberg, Hugo. "East and West in Contemporary Japanese Art." *College Art Journal*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1958, p. 37.

> In the 1960s, every abstract painter is fascinated by the East, dreams of visiting Japan, perhaps to find the delights of Japanese calligraphy.[173]

While Chinese art theorists after 1979 till now continue to discuss whether abstract art belongs to them and whether they have the right to use something which, in their opinion, originated in the West, Japanese avant-garde calligraphers in the 1950s entered the world art scene and exhibited in the leading art museums and galleries.

Calligraphers including Morita Shiryū, Inoue Yūichi, Hidai Nankoku, Ueda Sōkyū or Teshima Yūkei exhibited side-by-side with European and American abstractionists, such as Jackson Pollock, Pierre Soulages, Hans Hartung, Franz Kline, or Isamu Noguchi. The unprecedented post-war heyday of this East Asian art form, while remaining understudied, impacted the trajectories, visualities and concepts of post-war art across the globe.[174]

However, despite the superficial resemblance to Western abstract art, calligraphers realised that abstraction within the Western artistic tradition is not the same as abstraction within the calligraphic tradition. The Western artist is in an entirely different position to that of the calligrapher, as his relationship to his artistic tradition is much looser than that of the calligrapher to the calligraphic. He can much more easily deny or ignore the influence of art history on his artwork, and he can even ignore it, unlike the calligrapher, who is still somehow bounded by the rules on how to write; the calligrapher is to a certain extent dealing with tradition, using written language, relaying the forms of the characters.

Japanese avant-garde calligraphy became one of the impulses for Chinese artists living in mainland China to innovate in Chinese ink painting, to start their bold experiments. It gave them the courage to abandon the shapes and to break free from the realistic trends which appeared in China after 1949. The influence of Japanese calligraphy, together with avant-garde art movements in Hong Kong and Taiwan helped Chinese artists from mainland China to break free from regarding art as a means of propaganda which had to serve the people, its goal during the Cultural Revolution.

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[173] Seuphor, Michel. *Abstract Painting Fifty Years of Accomplishment, from Kadinsky to the Present*. Abrams, 1962, p. 233.

[174] Bogdanova-Kummer, Eugenia. "Postwar Calligraphy and Abstract Painting." *Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures*, https://sainsbury-institute.org/project/postwar-calligraphy-and-abstract-painting/, last retrieved 4 February 2020.

Japanese avant-garde calligraphy, perhaps also thanks to its international reputation, strongly influenced Chinese contemporary artists. A prominent Chinese art theorist Lu Hong claimed:

> Although the American abstract expression artist Tobey was inspired by Japanese calligraphy, Japanese calligraphy originated from Chinese calligraphy. So, I think he was actually inspired by Chinese calligraphy.[175]

It may be said that the idea of abandoning realistic description and the emphasis placed on the artist's feelings and on the attempt to express them in the artwork came from China with calligraphic brush strokes to Japan, impacted Abstract expressionism, Abstraction lyrique, and other artistic movements, and returned to China. Due to the close relations between Japan and the USA, the impact of Japanese art on Western artists was stronger and more direct than that of the art of artists from Hong Kong and Taiwan. It should be taken into account that although Japanese calligraphy is mentioned here last, it started earlier than the modernist movements in Hong Kong and Taiwan. The Japanese impact on artistic movements in Hong Kong and Taiwan is a different topic, which will not be examined further in this work.

The presentation of contemporary Chinese calligraphy, Honk Kong Ink Art Fair, Chinese pavilion participating artists: Gu Wenda, Wang Dongling, Zhang Hao, Jin Feng, Chen Guangwu. Exhibition date: December 15, 2016

[175] Lu Hong魯 虹. *Jiedu Wu Guoquan de shuimo zhi lu*解讀吳國全的水墨之路*Interpretation of Wu Guoquan's Ink and Wash Way*, opening ceremony speech at the Hei Gui exhibition, He Art Gallery, Wuhan, 6 August 2017. From information sent by Wu Guoquan (Lao He), September 2019.

III. Tradition and Modernity. Chinese Ink Art from Contemporary to Abstract

As was mentioned in the previous chapters, trends emphasizing that painting is not only a representation but also an expression of the author's feelings emerged early in Chinese art history. With the birth of the Song dynasty painters, opinions which preferred subjective expressions over realism became mainstream in Chinese painting. The subjectivity of the vision and the stylization of the object close to abstraction were manifested not only in *literati* painting but were even more evident in Chan Buddhist painting. In later periods, individual painters were of great importance to the development of subjectivity and expression. The elements of abstraction were manifested not only in painting but also in calligraphy, which by its very nature is close to abstract expression. This current of thought was also reflected in various art-theoretical writings on Chinese art history.

At the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, there were voices calling for the modernisation of China, not only in economics but also in culture, education and all aspects of life, including art. After the end of the Qing dynasty and the foundation of the republic in China in 1911, the question of modernization became more urgent than before. Kang Youwei (1858 – 1927) in his 1917 call for modernization rejected most of Chinese traditional painting, not only the "Four Wang", but also Shitao and Shi Xi.[176] From the end of the Qing Dynasty to the 1930s the Chinese government sent many students (about 60-70) to Western countries to study art. Most of them visited Japan and France. They brought Western ideas to Chinese society.

There were differing opinions as to what extent it was necessary to implement changes in Chinese art. Cai Yuanpei (1976-1940), after spending eight years in Europe and America, advocated the founding of art schools,

[176] Zhang Changhong張長虹. *Wo you wo fa: Shitao yishu yu shehui jieshou yanjiu* 我用我法：石濤藝術與社會接受研究*[I Use My Method: Research about Shitao´s Art and Social Acceptance]*. Shanhai shuhua chubanshe, 2019 (Kindle edition).

public art galleries and museums, which was guaranteed in the West, but almost unknown in China. His dream would not come true for decades but it founded a new conception of the position of art in Chinese society.[177]

Although the first seeds of modernism germinated in mainland China in the 1930s after the first Chinese students returned from Europe and Japan, different cultural and political circumstances meant that Chinese painting did not embrace real abstraction until the last third of the twentieth century or, more precisely, in the early 1980s. There was a period when China was closed to ideas coming from the West, from the 1950s until the end of the 1970s, because of the political situation. Art and the artists were living under political pressure. Whereas to begin with inspiration was taken from the Soviet Union and other Socialist countries, the Cultural Revolution closed the door and Chinese artists lost all connection with the situation outside China. Art was heavily restricted and only some art styles were allowed.

The 20th century in Chinese art history can be called the century of figurative art. Beside the emphasis on realism, which was contradictory to the art trends in the West, art was heavily influenced by political factors for several decades.

> During the 1950s and 1960s art was evaluated according to political requirements, "good" presented by revolutionary art, "not harmful" (landscapes or still lifes), and "harmful", which referred especially to nudes, abstract or expressionist works.[178]

Naturally, this development was far from being as simple and straightforward as it might seem. Some artists spoke of feeling disconnected from the tradition. According to Zhang Shuguang, who lived partly abroad, something of the ancient spirit was lost and it could not be easily re-established by learning technical skills.[179] Other artists were more optimistic.

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177 Sullivan, Michael. "Brush-Strokes and the Party Line." TSONG-ZUNG, Chang (Intro), Li Xianting. *China's New Art, Post-1989*, Hanart T.Z. Gallery, 1993, p. XXIV.

178 Sullivan, Michael. "Art in China since 1949". *The China Quarterly, Special Issue: The People's Republic of China after 50 Years*, No. 159, Sep., 1999, pp. 712-722.

179 From WeChat conversation with the artist, September 2019.

Wang Chuan. *Ink wash painting 2*, 1987, ink on paper

It is clear that Chinese painting is based on traditions, one of which is Chinese ink painting. Despite the fast and furious development of Chinese contemporary art as a whole, Chinese ink painting remained outside the avant-garde for a long time. It was affected by reformist currents of realism when the leading painter and teacher Xu Beihong (1895—1953), who studied abroad, introduced the Western model of teaching painting at the Beijing Academy of Fine Arts, a change which in the opinion of several Chinese artists was more harmful than helpful. Nevertheless, Mainland ink painting existed within its closed universe, in the world of references to old paintings, borrowing motifs and inspirations and looking at the avant-

gardist efforts of other artists with some suspicion. However, some artists felt a strong need for fresh input, that would revive ink painting, and that could bring it closer to the present.

It should be noted that the unique tradition of Chinese art has many concepts and directions that are inherently close to the modern world, such as expressing personality through painting, emphasizing the original artistic language of the brush and ink and others. That is all different from classical Western art, but on the contrary, spiritually related to modern art (especially avant-garde art). [180]

III. 1. The cultural background of the 1980s, the '85 New Wave

The first Chinese artists to devote themselves to abstract ink painting and who are mentioned in this research come from the '85 New Wave. After the political changes in the late 1970s when China opened its doors to the world, new ideas and the trends of modernism started to enter China.

After the long isolation caused by the Cultural Revolution, there was an urgent need in Chinese society to fill the gap in Chinese cultural history and reconnect Chinese art and cultural society with global art movements. In the early 1980s, a number of works of foreign literature and important philosophical works were translated into Chinese. Suddenly the impact of new ideas was a challenge for Chinese artists to create in new ways. Unlike literature, which tried to overcome painful experiences or the Cultural Revolution by writing the "literature of scars", visual artists were mostly fascinated and overwhelmed by the abundance of the styles and movements coming from the West.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the Chinese public has had the opportunity to see exhibitions not only of works by famous foreign artists, but also by Chinese artists living in Taiwan, Hong Kong or in Western countries, such as an exhibition by the experimental painter Liu Guosong residing in Taiwan, which took place in Beijing National Art Museum in 1983. Abstract and semi-abstract painting from Taiwan and Hong Kong heavily

[180] Liu Xiaochun劉驍純. "Chuangli xin guifan創立新規範,[Create new norms]." *Zhongguo hua*, no. 1, 1993, p. 15.

Gu Wenda. *World of Landscapes*, 1985, ink on paper

influenced Chinese ink art, as has been discussed in the previous chapter. The 1980s was the time when many new art groups and movement, including unorthodox and avant-garde, were born in China.

During the 1980s, students and intellectuals eagerly read all the abundant translations of literature from the West that they could get their hands on. Works by philosophers such as Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Heidegger, and Freud became quite popular with young people (Wu Hong spoke of

"philosophy fever")[181], alongside some authors of fiction, such as Milan Kundera. The literature of the early 1980s formed the 'Misty Poetry' movement, which brought a lyrical imagination and, for the time, an innovative approach to language.

Among the independent art groups, the Stars group has a prominent position, not so much due to the distinctive quality of their works, but by virtue of being one of the first movements of its kind to attempt the avant-garde after a long time lapse caused by the political situation in China. The first experiments with avant-garde art started in the 1930s.[182] On 28 September 1979 the Stars group, disgusted by the refusal of their exhibition, set up their paintings and sculptures on the railings in front of the Chinese Gallery. The quality of their artworks was questionable, but they succeeded in holding an exhibition in Beihai Park and later, in August 1980, they exhibited officially in the Chinese Museum of Art. When the Stars group appeared, it was the first attempt to reach out to modernist movements and to challenge traditions and official academic structures. Despite the growing acceptance of trends in contemporary art, the attitude to abstract art was quite hostile. In the words of Gao Minglu:

> Very interestingly, in the late 1970s and early 1980s Chinese artists, no matter whether underground or academic, were all fond of talking about the "abstract", for it was synonymous with Western modernist art. In addition, in the eyes of the official conservative camp "abstract" was equivalent to the contemporary Western decadent school and liberalism. Modernism always bore the brunt in each official campaign, while the term "abstract" in fact became a byword for illegal art.[183]

Since its inception during the late 1970s and early 1980s, Chinese contemporary art has been characterised by the use of images, attitudes and techniques appropriated from Western(ised) modernist and international

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[181] Wu Hong. *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History 1970s – 2000s*, Thames & Hudson, 2014, p. 56.

[182] There was an exhibition NOVA in 1935, which presented the first avant-garde in China, and some artists who had studied in Western countries tried to do modern art. See further in Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth-century China*. University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1996, pp. 59-60.

[183] Gao, Minglu. *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*. MIT Press, 2011, pp. 80-81.

postmodernist art. This appropriation lends a strong sense of present modernity to Chinese contemporary art that distinguishes it sharply from traditional and to some extent more obviously culturally mixed forms of modern Chinese art.[184]

The most important of all these groups was probably '85 New Wave,[185] a movement that included almost all aspects of art. '85 New Wave appeared in the middle of the 1980s mostly in the visual arts but also included to some extent other artistic fields, such as literature and poetry, and influenced the minds of a whole young generation until the end of the decade. This movement was influenced by the West, and in a short time, it reflected most of the world's major art styles of the 20th century, notably surrealism, expressionism, symbolism, happenings, performance and pop-art up to the art of the 1980s, in the works of the Chinese avant-garde. '85 New Wave formed the Chinese avant-garde, which was responding to world art and searching for its place.[186] New views were formed by this movement, which, inspired by philosophical views which rapidly entered China, as well as by a wealth of translations of theoretical and literary works, well informed about the world of art, sought to define the position of Chinese modernity in the context of global modern art.

It is essential to mention that there are basic differences between Western avant-garde and Chinese avant-garde art movements. The first and most important is the different target of avant-garde movements in Western countries compared to China. According to Gao Minglu, a prominent art theorist closely connected to the avant-garde movement '85 New Wave, 'we may consider the Chinese avant-garde movement of the 1980s and 1990s as a response to alienation, targeting not the vulgarity and philistinism of a consumer society, as did their Western counterparts, but rather the dominant, ideologically driven society, as it became combined with the commercial

[184] Gladston, Paul. "Somewhere (and Nowhere) between Modernity and Tradition: Towards a Critique of International and Indigenous Perspectives on the Significance of Contemporary Chinese Art." *Tate Papers*, no. 21, Spring 2014, <<https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/21/somewhere-and-nowhere-between-modernity-and-tradition-towards-a-critique-of-international-and-indigenous-perspectives-on-the-significance-of-contemporary-chinese-art, last retrieved 20 January 2020.

[185] 85 Xinchao/85 新潮.

[186] Zhangová Daniela. "Premeny čínskeho maliarstva [Changes in Chinese Painting]". *Výtvarný život / Art Life*, no. 3, 1995, p. 40.

imperative'.[187] It may be noted that the word avant-garde in the Chinese context shifted from its original meaning. The original name for the 1985 movement or movements used in this study is '85 New Wave. According to Gao, the word avant-garde is used in English texts, while Chinese sources often use the term 'experimental art', or merely the word 'modernism'. Sometimes the more neutral connotation of 'contemporary' art is also used.[188]

Shen Qin. *Three Connected Landscapes*, 1986, ink on paper

> On the other hand, 'avant-garde' seems to be better suited to highlight the "contemporaneity" of contemporary Chinese art. As was mentioned above, 'contemporaneity' is a term referring to a specific time, but rather means the "spirit of the time". Therefore, to be "avant-garde" is to make choices, to adopt a specific critical direction.[189]

The bottom-up cultural transformation in the '85 New Wave is the second movement of reform after the 'May 4 Movement', that is, deconstruct-

[187] Gao, Minglu. *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*. The MIT Press, 2011, p. 7.

[188] Gao, Minglu. *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*. The MIT Press, 2011, p. 9 (abbreviated).

[189] Gao, Minglu. *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*. The MIT Press, 2011, pp. 8-9.

ing the tradition, abandoning the Cultural Revolution, advocating freedom, shaking off the shackles of ideology, and encouraging cultural modernisation and diversification of ideas.[190]

One area where Chinese diverges from Western art is the role contemporary art plays in the articulation of what can be thought, felt and said, the traditional domain of an avant-garde movement. The aesthetic avant-garde has been the pride of the West, but its avatars have moved East. This move raises the question of whether and how much this avant-garde is inflected by "China," by its ancient and its recent history. The question is whether and how what might stand out as distinctly Chinese can assert itself in the presence of the global reach of Western practices. [191]

Unlike most of the vanguard movements in China before, which emerged mostly in big cities and cultural centres such as Beijing, Shanghai, the '85 New Wave movement included cultural events, mainly concerning visual arts, in the whole of China. Many different art groups and art societies appeared, encouraged by the relative freedom after the Cultural Revolution. Artists and ordinary people in China before 1989 were better provided for compared with most Eastern European countries under a Communist regime at the time, as far as universities, the possibility of publishing articles, having access to Western philosophical works or fiction were concerned. For example, a translation of Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* was published in 1987.[192] The same book was not officially published in the Czech Republic until 2006, and before 1989 it was available only as a "samizdat"[193] or by the exiles' publishing house 68 Publishers in Toronto.[194] Some journals, such as *Meishu sichao*

[190] Peng De 彭德論85新潮：新潮美術論 [Peng De on the '85 New Wave: Art Theory of the New Wave]." 鳳凰 *Phoenix Web*, [Peng De on the '85 New Wave: Art Theory of the New Wave]." 凤凰*Phoenix Web*, 24 June 2014, news.artron.net/20150724/n763726_3.html, (abbreviated) last retrieved 15 September 2019.

[191] Wiseman, Mary Bittner. "Subversive Strategies in Chinese Avant-Garde Art." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 65, no. 1, 2007, pp. 109-119.

[192] Milan Kundera米蘭·昆德拉. *Shengming zhong bu neng chengshou zhi qing* 生命中不能承受之輕 *[The Unbearable Lightness of Being]*. Zuojia chubanshe, 1987.

[193] The Russian word for underground publications in the former Eastern bloc.

[194] Balogh, Alexander. "Milan Kundera prehovoril po česky [Milan Kundera Started to Speak Czech]." *Www.sme.sk*, SME.sk, 1 Nov. 2006, www.sme.sk/c/2979350/milan-kundera-prehovoril-po-cesky.html. Last retrieved 20 January 2020.

(Art thoughts)[195], *Jiangsu huakan*,[196] or the even more conservative official *Meishu*, were to some extent involved in the avant-garde movement or at least their articles were less hostile. Many exhibitions were organised and the Chinese avant-garde attracted considerable attention due to the forced closure of the exhibition in February 1989 in the National Art Museum. The exhibition was closed twice.

The show was interrupted and temporarily closed after two artists, Tang Song (b. 1960 and Xiao Lu (b. 1962), well-connected children of army generals, fired gunshots at their own installation so as to complete the artwork through performance. However, this does not mean that the avant-garde art movement stopped altogether in 1989; it has developed even more vigorously ever since.[197]

The majority of artworks created in the avant-garde movement were oil paintings, installations and other media, related to Western art, but a few early avant-garde ink paintings appeared as well. Artists involved in '85 New Wave were mostly orientated towards genres coming from the West, such as oil painting, installations, performances. Nevertheless, some bold experiments dealing with ink and wash emerged with '85 New Wave. Artists connected with '85 New Wave are Gu Wenda, who now lives in New York but has a studio in Shanghai, Xu Bing, who also lives abroad, Wang Chuan, who left China for the US and then returned in around 2000, Shen Qin, Song Gang, Dong Chao, Wang Gongyi, who left China and is currently living in the US, and others. These artists started to create and exhibit their experimental ink paintings in the mid-1980s, and all of them participated in the exhibition China Avant-garde in the Chinese gallery in Beijing, 1989. Most of them are not closely connected with the later art

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[195] *Meishu sichao* 美術思潮 *(Art thoughts)* was a journal of art theory and criticism, published between 1984 and 1987. It played an important role in the '85 New Wave art movement. See further in "Meishu sichao 美术思潮." *Baike*, baike.baidu.com/item/%E7%BE%8E%E6%9C%AF%E6%80%9D%E6%BD%AE. Last retrieved 25 January 2020.

[196] *Jiangsu huakan* 江蘇畫刊 started as a provincial art journal in 1974. It started to be more influential after 1985, when it began to focus more on contemporary art. See further in "Jiangsu huakan 江苏画刊." *Baidu*, baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%B1%9F%E8%8B%8F%E7%94%BB%E5%88%8A/2499342. Last retrieved 25 January 2020.

[197] Lu, Hsiao-Peng Sheldon. "Art, Culture, and Cultural Criticism in Post-New China." *New Literary History*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1997, p.114. See also Köppel-Yang, Martina. *Semiotic warfare: a semiotic analysis, the Chinese avant-garde, 1979-1989*, Timezone 8, 2003, pp. 174-180.

movements in China, such as the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash painting, but some participated in later exhibitions, too.

Wang Gongyi. *Einstein #3*, 2017,Watercolour and clamshell powder on rice paper[198]

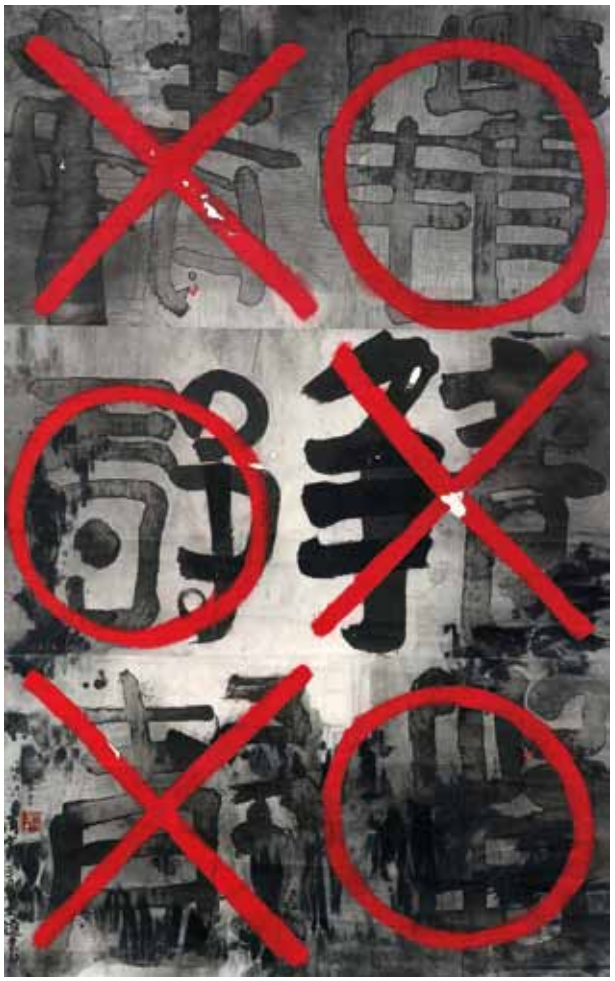
[198] By courtesy of CHAMBERS FINE ART前波畫廊.

Wang Gongyi王公懿(b. 1946) graduated from Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in 1980 and continued to work there after graduating. In 1986, Wang was invited by the French government to participate in a Pan-Pacific cultural programme. In 1990, she moved abroad, has had more than twenty solo exhibitions, mostly in the USA, China and France and participated in numerous exhibitions around the world. Since 2001, she has lived in Portland, Oregon and Hangzhou in China. Her works are displayed in galleries in the USA, Hong Kong, and China, for example CHAMBERS FINE ART 前波畫廊.[199]

Wang Gongyi's abstract and semi-abstract ink paintings are exhibited in galleries around the world, too. She continues to do abstract painting, but her works include semi-abstract landscapes, flowers, and figurative paintings. Sometimes she uses colours, such as blue, instead of ink. Her style of abstract ink painting is mostly rooted in calligraphy. Occasionally she uses a calligraphic script to fill the whole paper, turning calligraphy into bold lines filling most of the white space on the paper, showing some similarities with Western artists using hand script in their works; from time to time she adopts free strokes of the broad brush to complete painting. As well as ink painting, she also does printmaking, so some of her works look like abstract ink paintings, but are in fact prints. In her abstract work "blue painting", it is clear that this artwork has been inspired more by Western modernism than traditional Chinese ink painting. Like many Chinese artists living abroad, Wang draws inspiration from multiple cultural sources, and her works are typical of this intersection between cultures. She proclaimed her affiliation with Chinese culture by using Chinese *xuan* paper. However, the painting owes its cultural heritage to both West and East, the calmness and the meditative atmosphere somewhat reminiscent of Six Persimmons, by the Chan Buddhist painter Mu Qi (1210?–1269?).

Gu Wenda and Xu Bing are essential for the further development of experimental ink painting, which includes abstract painting, and are of crucial importance to the development of Chinese contemporary art. Their works include more than two-dimensional paintings; they both are well-known mostly for their installations, such as the Book of Heaven exhibited at the 89 China Avant-garde exhibition by Xu Bin or the installation covering the Great Wall with Chinese characters written using ink on Chinese

[199] The picture of her artwork published here was provided by CHAMBERS FINE ART前波畫廊.



Gu Wenda. *Mythos of Lost Dynasties-E Series, No.5*, 1996-1997

paper by Gu Wenda. Both artists play with Chinese characters, applying them differently from traditional calligraphy.

Gu Wenda谷文達 (b. 1955) graduated from the Shanghai School of Arts in 1976. In 1981, he received his MFA from the China Academy of Arts where he studied classical landscape painting and went on to teach. Gu has been living in the United States since 1987. He was an associate professor of studio art at the University of Minnesota from 1989 to 1990. He has been invited to lecture at various art academies, universities

Gu Wenda. *Mythos of Lost Dynasties-E Series, No.1*, 1996

and institutions worldwide. His works have been exhibited in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, Korea, Australia, Germany, Norway, France, Russia, the Netherlands, Italy, Great Britain, Mexico, Switzerland, Sweden, Poland, Brazil, Canada, the United States and other countries and regions.

Gu Wenda's early installations often consisted of traditional Chinese paper, *xuan* 宣, covered with Chinese characters, and frottages combined with other materials. His works are full of expression, and they present the

beginnings of contemporary Chinese ink painting. Some of his works suggest *da zi bao*大字報 posters used during the Cultural Revolution. Other times he uses Chinese calligraphy; sometimes his style of writing has little to do with expressing something in a calligraphic style, and more with the all-encompassing message of the artist. His works are regarded as the beginnings of conceptual ink art in China. They have been appearing in the major art magazines since the 1980s. Sometimes fragments of Chinese landscape appear, but often he uses Chinese paper and ink for his bold installations. Gu Wenda's pseudo-characters allow the viewer to be stimulated by their vague and variegated elements.

Gu Wenda's most striking works of 1985 and 1986 are a series of large paintings, some in several panels, dominated by Chinese characters that are often reversed, crossed out, or overwritten in red. These questioning, symbolic works represented a direct challenge to authority[200] by violating the orthodox doctrine of artistic value. In his words, although experimental ink painting was defined as a movement only in the late 1980s, the first experiments with ink in China began much earlier; the movement with the name followed. He began experimenting with ink in the early 1980s.[201] In his artistic research, he focused on the production of new materials, an aim which seeks the essence of Chinese painting. He often uses hair in his works. He produces a special ink made from human hair in liquid form and in the traditional form of solid sticks. He makes his paper from various materials, such as Chinese tea.

The greatest contribution of Gu Wenda, who began to make a name for himself during the period of '85 New Wave, has been to separate ink and brush whilst continuing to emphasise the use of line, understanding both as independent expressive and aesthetic elements to be used in an expanded way. In terms of technique, such works primarily involved the splashing, pouring, and rinsing of large areas of ink, even using an airbrush in order to mould figurative forms in compositions essentially derived from the surrealism of Salvador Dali.[202]

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200 Sullivan, Michael, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-century China,* University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1996, pp. 264-265.

201 Interview with the artist in Gu Wenda's studio in Shanghai, 8 September 2019.

202 Lu Hong. "The Formation and Development of New Ink Art in China." *M Matters | M* 思考, www.mplusmatters.hk/inkart/paper_topic2.php?l=en. Last retrieved 25 January 2020.

Gu Wenda lives at present in Shanghai and New York with studios in both cities. In his latest studio in Qifu he creates "ink sculptures". In his words, ink is firstly material, but at the same time, ink painting has become part of Chinese cultural identity. In his opinion, abstraction includes much more than it seems at first glance, and his artworks with intentionally erroneous, non-existent Chinese characters (*cuobiezi*錯別字), could be classified as abstract. He even claimed that his latest sculpture experiment, in Qifu, which he calls stone inks, Chinese characters carved in black marble, can be called abstract artwork. However, in this case there are no pseudo-characters since it is impossible to see the whole character from a single angle of view. From his words, we can see that he does not hesitate to label his works as abstract.[203]

Gu Wenda. *Mythos of Lost Dynasties Series – I Evaluate Characters Written by Three Men and Three Women*, 1985, hanging scroll, ink on paper

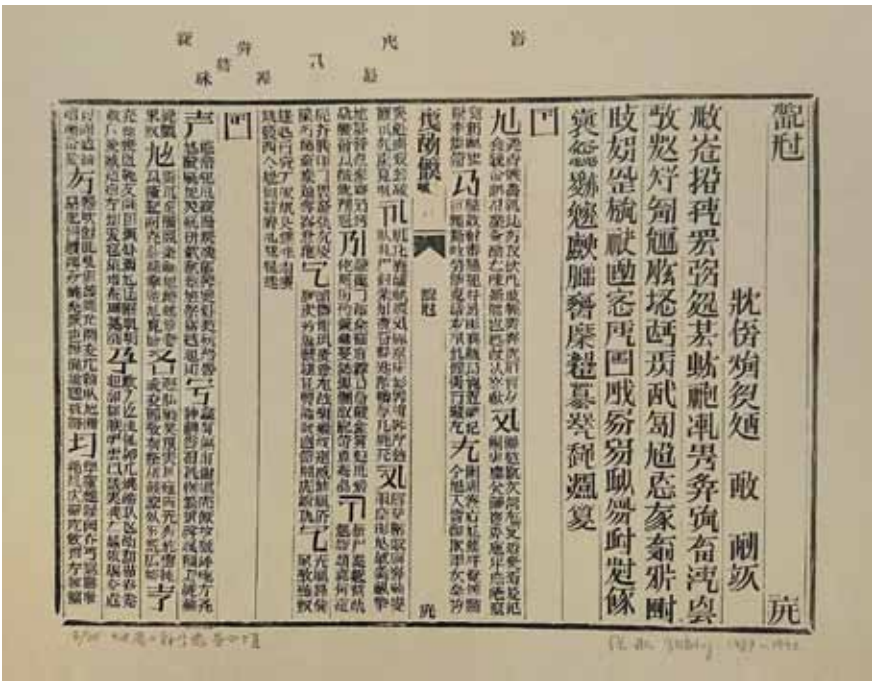
[203] Interview with the artist in Gu Wenda's studio in Shanghai, 8 September 2019.

This attitude shows us that his approach to abstraction is radically different from the artists and critics residing in mainland China. Most Chinese art critics hesitate to classify Gu Wenda's pseudo-characters as abstract because they consist of the elements of Chinese characters, existing in reality and therefore they are not an abstraction in the strict sense of the term According to Gu Wenda, even calligraphy carved in stone can be considered to a certain extent to be abstract art, because it is impossible to capture the meaning of huge Chinese characters while looking at them from one side, and you cannot see the whole character, which covers the surface of the stone on all sides. Of course, even when acknowledging this understanding of abstraction, which is radical and unusual in the Chinese cultural context, calligraphy or abstracted lines carved in black marble, labelled by Gu as abstraction, cannot be considered as abstract painting. Gu Wenda's view on abstraction, influenced by living in between cultures, clearly displays a radically different approach from the Chinese artists residing mostly in China.

Xu Bing徐冰 (b. 1955) graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing (CAFA) in 1981 and gained his Master's degree in 1987. He moved to the United States in 1990, where he lived until he returned to China in 2007. From 2008 to 2014, Xu Bing served as the vice president of CAFA, working as a professor and now director of the Academic Committee. He currently lives and works in Beijing and New York.[204]

[204] Xu Bing's work has been shown at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, DC; Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kansas; the British Museum, London; the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Spain; the Joan Miró Foundation, Spain; the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney; the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; the National Gallery of Prague, Czech Republic; and the Museum Ludwig, Cologne. In addition, Xu Bing has participated in the 45th, 51st and 56th Venice Biennales, the Biennale of Sydney, and the Johannesburg Biennale amongst other international exhibitions. He was featured in the documentary film *The Enduring Passion for Ink: Films on Contemporary Ink Painters* by the scholar-curator Britta Erickson, in 2013, which presents ten contemporary Chinese ink artists at the vanguard of the contemporary Chinese art world today. Other featured artists included in this book are Yang Jiechang, Zheng Chongbin, Wang Dongling, and Li Huasheng. For further information see: Xu Bing, http://www.xubing.com/en/about. Last retrieved 25 January 2020.

He is best known for his printmaking skills and his installation art, as well as his creative use of language, words, and text and how they have affected our understanding of the world. Unlike Gu Wenda, Xu Bing in his *Book of Heaven* tried to avoid any writing by hand; his newly created meaningless 'Chinese characters' were printed in order to have the look of a new language, looking familiar yet unknown.



Xu Bing. *Book from the Sky*, 1987-90, woodblock print

This work is, without any doubt, one of the most impressive visual realizations of text in the visual arts, while also evoking numerous associations. In four years Xu engraved 4000 characters in pear wood. However, not a single one can be read or spoken: although the author uses elements that make up authentic Chinese characters, they all lack meaning – Xu Bing has transformed them into an unreadable flood of characters without meaning[205]. Is this the destruction of language and words or its re-creation

[205] Kesner, L. ml. *Kniha z nebe a kaligrafická třída[Book of Heaven and Schools of Calligraphy]* (catalogue of the exhibition), NG Zbraslav, 2000, p. 19.

– but in an entirely new, different way? The book becomes illegible; its letters, which remind every Chinese-speaking person of Chinese characters, make no sense. Xu leaves readers in search of understanding and when they give up, he leads them into silence. It reminds us of a famous sentence written in the ancient Chinese philosophy book Dao De Jing "He who knows (the Tao) does not (care to) speak (about it)[206]". Is it necessary to be silent WITHOUT words? In his conversation with Jonathan Hay, Xu Bing expressed his opinion on his *Book from the Sky*:

> Strictly speaking, *A Book from the Sky* does not have any connection with the text, since there is no "real" text, even though it takes the form of books and the appearance of "words." However, it does have a connection with writing and printing. In Beijing, I worked in a small printing house known for making beautifully bound books and facsimiles of classic books. I spent a lot of time studying book printing so that eventually I was able to distinguish different styles of binding the Song dynasty style, the Ming dynasty style, and so on."[207]

After leaving China, Xu continued to play with language and written text. His *Schools of Calligraphy* used Latin letters to create a new kind of transcription. His passion for pseudo-characters, showing that the words can cause misunderstanding, had changed to using the fragments of Latin letters for creating something similar to Chinese characters as he was searching for cross-cultural understanding.

Artists who left the country and became world-famous stayed in touch with Chinese artists of their generation, and their works sometimes appear in Chinese books presenting contemporary painting or ink painting, implying that they contributed to a degree to the Chinese art scene. Their artworks often appear in museums, for example Gu Wenda's installation in the Museum of Contemporary art in San Francisco. Their artistic achievements became an iconic manifestation of the '85 New Wave movement.

When mentioning Chinese artists using ink who participated in the exhibition *China/Avant-garde* in 1989 and went abroad, we should not forget

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[206] *Tao Te Ching, or, the Tao and Its Characteristics*. (translation by Legge, James), Floating Press, 2008, p. 102.

[207] Leung, Simon, Kaplan, Janet A., Gu Wenda, Xu Bing and Hay, Jonathan. "Pseudo-Languages: A Conversation with Wenda Gu, Xu Bing, and Jonathan Hay." *Art Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (Autumn, 1999), published by CAA, pp. 86-99, quotation, p. 88.

Xu Bing. *Book from the Sky*, 1987-1990 woodblock prints

the well-known artist Yang Jiechang楊詰蒼 (b. 1956). In 2005, he was visiting artist at Stanford University; in 2008, he was appointed to the Sterling visiting Professorship at the Stanford University Medical School, Department of Chemical and Systems Biology. He currently lives and works in Paris, France and Heidelberg, Germany. Yang Jiechang combines traditional Eastern and Western modes of representation in his multimedia work. His monochrome ink paintings combine the aesthetics of contemporary painting with the tools and techniques of traditional East Asian ink-and-wash artwork. Yang also works with video, photography, and sculpture.[208]

[208] He has participated in more than thirty exhibitions in China, France, Korea, Italy, Belgium, Great Britain, Turkey, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, the USA, and other countries. Some of his exhibitions include: *Les Magiciens de la terre*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1989, *Zone of Urgency*, Venice Biennale, Venice, 2003, M*etamorphosis – The Generation of Transformation in Chinese Comtemporary Art*, Tampere Art Museum, Tampere, Finland, 2007, *Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2013, *Harmony and Transition. Chinese Landscapes in Contemporary Art*, MARTa Herford, Herford, Germany, 2015. He was featured in the documentary film *The Enduring Passion for Ink: Films on Contemporary Ink Painters*. For more information, see "Yang Jiechang." *Chambers Fine Art*, www.chambersfineart.com/artists/yang-jiechang. last retrieved 1 November 2019.

Yang Jiechang is another artist from the generation who grew up during and after the Cultural Revolution. He absorbs in his works the long traditions of Chinese calligraphy, using them in a modern, conceptual way. He claimed that in his artistic infancy he was not influenced by Abstract Expressionism or any contemporary Western artistic movements, as he was living in post-Maoist China and any news about latest art trends was limited for political reasons. Not all his works are abstract; he paints in different styles and techniques. Ink painting makes up only part of his output. The cultural impact of Western ideas, which was the spark that ignited the '85 New Wave, was still based on only fragmentary information about what was happening in western countries. As he stated:

I was surprised when people in Paris and New York said I was imitating Mark Tobey and Robert Motherwell. I didn't know about them. A journalist in Oxford asked me if I was imitating Kasimir Malevich. I didn't even know who Malevich was; I thought he was a fictional character—the driver in the film *Lenin in October*. Tobey and Pollock got their inspiration from East Asian art, adding some romanticism to it. When there is an artist from East Asia doing something similar, it is wrongly interpreted as an imitation. Why not say those artists imitated me? There are Chinese artists of many different generations, but our roots are ours, deep in the blood. Starting from the time I began learning calligraphy at the age of three, I was learning this kind of action painting. Chinese calligraphy is a discipline immersed in this kind of action.[209]

Another artist coming from '85 New Wave, who now resides in the United States, is Zheng Chongbin 鄭重賓(b. 1961). He attended Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts to study Chinese painting and taught there for four years after graduating in 1984. In 1989, he was awarded the First International Fellowship to further his training at the San Francisco Art Institute, acquiring his MFA in 1991. He currently resides in San Francisco with a studio in Shanghai. As one of the most notable artists on the emerging Chinese ink painting scene, Zheng was awarded an Artist Excellence Exhibition Series Grant by the San Francisco Chinese Cultural Foundation in 2011, and furthermore was in-

[209] By Yang Jiechang, Yu-Chieh Li. "Action Painting is Not Calligraphy: A Conversation with Yang Jiechang." Posted on January 15, 2016, available at: MoMa, https://post.at.moma.org/content_items/707-action-painting-is-not-calligraphy-a-conversation-with-yang-jiechang, last retrieved 25 November 2019.

Yang Jiechang. *1000 Layers of Ink, No. 2*, 1994, ink on paper

cluded in Christie's exhibition on Chinese contemporary ink that featured pioneering artists who first gained prominence abroad such as Liu Kuo-sung, Gu Wenda, Xu Bing, Yang Jiechang, and Qin Feng.[210]

[210] Zheng Chongbin was awarded the permanent site-specific installation art project from Moshe Sadie Associates, commissioned by the Sand's Corporation at Marina Bay Sands Integrated Resort in Singapore. His works reside in the collection of the British Museum, San Francisco Asian Art Museum, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore, Daimler Art Collection, Germany, DSL Collection, France. He has had solo and group exhibitions at the Hong Kong Arts Centre, Hong Kong, Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai, Palazzo Mora, Venice Biennale, Italy, University of Alberta Museum, Alberta, Canada, Taipei 2010 Contemporary Ink Painting Biennale, Taiwan, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, Asian Pacific Art Museum, Pasadena, Pusan Museum of Modern Art, South Korea, China National Art Institute, Beijing, The Third Chengdu Biennale, Chengdu,

He was mentioned in the film *The Enduring Passion for Ink: Films on Contemporary Ink Painters*.

Zheng Chongbin fuses Western abstraction with the Chinese calligraphic tradition in works of ink- and acrylic-on-paper, finding contemporary relevance in ancient forms of Asian ink art. Having studied and divided his time between China and the United States, Zheng reveals the influences of both places and artistic traditions in his work. Layering ink of various consistencies onto *xuan* paper, Zheng creates a variety of forms with his dexterous brushwork. "My intention," says Zheng, "is to investigate the logic of the ink medium and its perceptual characteristics, the alternation between transcendence and the materiality of the work." Increasingly, Zheng has worked in other forms of art, producing video works and installations that create a perceptual play between space and objects. *Ink Stone* (2009) is a video of a hand holding an ink stick and grinding it on an ink stone—an important meditative procedure undertaken before beginning an ink painting.[211]

Zheng Chongbin uses ink and acrylic colours to construct his wide abstract surfaces. Sometimes the traces of ink running on the paper are visible. Hard edges and linear shapes are more typical of his work than calligraphic brushstrokes, but the feeling still reminds us of ink painting in an elaborate way. Although his paintings take inspiration from contemporary art, some resemblances with Pierre Soulages and other great artists can be observed; the fusion between two cultures is visible. He is fascinated by the opacity and transparency of ink, deeply influenced by the cultural background of the Chinese ink tradition, using it in a creative way.

One of the most representative Chinese experimental painters coming from '85 New Wave is Wang Chuan王川 (b. 1953). He was a member of the Chinese avant-garde movement in the 1980s. In 1982, he graduated in traditional Chinese painting from Sichuan Fine Art Institute. His works attracted critical attention from the start.[212] He resided in the US in the period

China, and National Art Museum, Beijing . See further in "ZHENG Chongbin: 亞洲藝術中心." *Asia Art Center*, www.asiaartcenter.org/asia/portfolio/ 鄭重賓/?lang=en. Last retrieved 25 January 2020.

[211] "Zheng Chongbin 郑重宾." *Ink Studio*, www.inkstudio.com.cn/zh/artists/55-zheng-chongbin/overview/. Last retrieved 25 January 2020.

[212] He received the Award of The Second National Youth Art Exhibition, Beijing in 1981, First Prise for Oil Painting in the Beijing National Employee Art Exhibition, China Art Museum, Beijing in 1983. Wang Chuan participated in the exhibition *China/Avant-garde,* 1989 and many other exhibitions such as: *Chinese Contemporary Ink Painting Art Ex-*

around 2000 and after his stay returned to China. He now lives in Beijing. Some people call him a minimalist artist.

Wang Chuan started his career as a figurative painter but turned to abstraction halfway through the 1980s. His work, regardless of whether he was using ink or oil, maintained the same high standard. By his own admission he likes the ancient Chinese painting of Shitao, Zhu Da and other individualist painters; he uses broad strokes of the brush to express his feelings.[213] In comparing his oil painting "Inaudible music" from 1985 and his abstract ink painting "Untitled" done in the same period, there are undeniable connections between them. For him, there are no differences between ink painting and aquarelle or oil painting; all is in the artist's mind.[214] Wang's varied life experiences inflected his paintings. In addition to bearing first-hand witness to modern China's stunning and ongoing transfor-

Wang Chuan. *Ink on Paper No. 57*, 1995, ink on paper

hibition, Kunsthaus, Hamburg, Germany in 2012, *Boundary of Freedom, Fourth Round, Chinese Contemporary Ink Towards Basel*, Miami Nina Torres Art Gallery: the Branch of Taihe Art Gallery in America in 2013, *Post-Calligraphy in Chinese Contemporary Art*, Foundation for Art and Culture Bonn, Berlin, Germany in 2015, and he has had more than 20 solo exhibitions in China, the USA, Taiwan, Germany, and other countries.

213 From correspondence with the artist, 2000.

214 Qian Zhijian 錢志堅. "Wang Chuan de youyu yu xiandai shuimo hua de gangga chujin 王川的猶豫與現代水墨的尷尬處境/Mr. Wang Chuan's hesitation and the awkward position of modern wash painting", *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century /Ershi shiji mo zhongguo xiandai shuimo yishu zoushi*, Modern Ink and Wash Painting Series, III, Heilongjiang meishu chubanshe, 1996, p. 26.

Wang Chuan. *Ink on Paper No. 45*, 1995, ink on paper

mation, he spent time living in the United States, practised Buddhism in Nepal, and lived in solitude in a small fishing village in Shenzhen. Rendered with a seemingly paradoxical combination of exquisite subtlety and robust expression, his compositions range from the spare and monochrome to the fully and richly coloured. Many are structured by his lush, sweeping lines, which wiggle and stretch across paper and canvas and display the full scope of traditional Chinese ink painting techniques.[215]

[215] Kedmey, Karen. "Abstract Artist Wang Chuan Makes Paintings Merging East and West," *Artsy.net,* https://www.artsy.net/article/editorial-abstract-artist-wang-chuan-makes-paintings-merging, last retrieved 15 January 2020.

After he went abroad in 1996, he continued to participate in the exhibitions of Experimental ink and others in mainland China and his works were published in the catalogues of the movement. He is one of the artists working with both techniques—oil painting and ink painting, an idea which was barely conceivable in the period of the 1990s but nowadays has more adherents because there are other artists who believe that ink and oil painting are not so different, that it is possible to create in oil painting and not lose the spirit of Chinese culture. He is one of the Chinese artists who has devoted most of his life to creating abstract paintings, no matter the medium. His style has changed radically several times, and his recent works are very different from those presented here, but he mainly does abstract art. His paintings from 2016-2017 are still based on the idea of lines, but they are far less influenced by calligraphy. Instead of exploring the lines made by the Chinese brush, he creates structures similar to those of crystal. Some of his abstract or semi-abstract constructions are based on flat lines combined with graffiti-like surfaces.

Shen Qin沈勤 (b. 1958) is another accomplished ink painter, who started to exhibit his painting in the 1980s, as a member of the generation of *China/Avant-Garde* in 1989.[216] Although he displayed his abstract work in the exhibition in 1989, most of his works found on websites are semiabstract landscapes. In the 1990s, he went into self-exile, and although he did not refuse to participate in some exhibitions, he had very little contact with other artists.

During the whole of the 1990s, not only did he refuse to communicate with local fine art magazines, but he also cut off contact with other local artists. To use his words as an explanation, "As a matter of fact, painting cannot assume this degree of responsibility. If, thanks to the efforts of our

[216] In 1978, he was admitted to the Chinese Painting Research Class of Jiangsu Provincial Chinese Painting Institute. In 2003 he lectured at the University of British Columbia, Canada. Shen Qin is currently a national first-class artist at the National Painting Institute of Jiangsu Province, living and working in Shijiazhuang. He has participated in more than fifty collective exhibitions and has had several solo exhibitions, mostly in China. His work is in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum (New York), the Hamburg Art Museum (Hamburg), the National Art Museum of China (Beijing), the Suzhou Art Museum (Suzhou), and the Guangdong Art Museum (Guangzhou). For more information see "沈勤 SHEN Qin: 亞洲藝術中心: Asia Art Center." 沈勤 *SHEN Qin* | 亞洲藝術中心 | *Asia Art Center*, www.asiaartcenter.org/asia/portfolio/沈勤/. Last retrieved 28 January 2020.

ancestors, painting, unlike embroidery, has become a high art, then what else needs to be fought for? As long as there is a group activity, one's liberty seems not so important, so there is no fun."[217] Although he had very few contacts with the outside world, he participated in some exhibitions of the Movement of 'Experimental Ink and Wash Painting', as well as in many important exhibitions in China, such as the exhibition of Yipai in Beijing in 2009 organised by Gao Minglu, and many others.

Shen Qin. *Field 009*, 2014, ink on paper

Shen Qin is one of the most representative artists in contemporary ink painting in China. According to Pi Daojian, "His art contains an apparent quality of aloofness, and reveals endless loneliness."[218] While his earlier works show some features of surrealism, his recent ones are more in the style of minimalism, as much in the composition as in the final realization. His brushwork is reduced to pure emotion; he rejects any colours except for the variety of black ink. His artistic language breaks down the barriers built by traditional painting; he struggles for harmony between western and eastern aesthetics. The lyrical composition of his early works reminding us of wrapped textiles and bearing the name 'mountain' were later transformed into highly stylised geometric landscapes, dissimilar to traditional Chinese landscapes, more inspired by Western symbolism and cubism than by traditional ink landscapes.

[217] Pi, Daojian. "Settle Down in the Water Ink World – The Painting Life of Marginal Man Shen Qin." *Asia Art Center*, www.asiaartcenter.org/asia/portfolio/shen-qin/?lang=en, last retrieved 1 November 2019.

[218] Pi, Daojian. "Settle Down in the Water Ink World – The Painting Life of Marginal Man Shen Qin." *Asia Art Center*, www.asiaartcenter.org/asia/portfolio/shen-qin/?lang=en, last retrieved 1 November 2019.

Last but not least, a contemporary abstract ink painter who was involved in '85 New Wave mentioned in this chapter is Song Gang宋鋼 (b. 1960). He, along with Wang Chuan, is one of the artists who participated in the exhibition *China/Avant-garde* in 1989, when he belonged to the boldest as well as most cultivated artists using ink. His abstract works came from Chinese calligraphy, showing the features of the art of lines and strokes. The big brushstrokes remind us in some ways of American Action painting. Looking at his paintings, we cannot forget the strong influence of *kuangcao*, the most stylised kind of Chinese calligraphy, especially ancient masters such as Zhang Xu and Huaisu, 'expressionists' from the late Tang dynasty such as Wang Mo and the works of Chan Buddhist's painters with their stylization. We can feel the speed of his movement and see the drops of ink everywhere. He was not active in the Movement of experimental ink painting of the 1990s, but his works compared to the Movement are of a high artistic level. It seems that Song Gang did not participate in any exhibitions as he is not mentioned in the catalogues of the movement and his traces on the internet are barely visible. However, his achievements inspired later artists of ink painting.

The artistic ambitions and aspirations of the Chinese people for a better society which would develop peacefully by small steps were somewhat similar to the movement for democratization in the former Czechoslovakia called the Prague Spring of 1968 which was brought to an end in August 1968 by the invasion of Soviet army and other forces of the Warsaw Pact. The student demonstrations on Tiananmen Square ended in a massacre on 4 June 1989. Despite political repression and intensifying political pressure in the media and in universities, the atmosphere of the Cultural Revolution has not returned. Gao Minglu claimed that he was facing persecution because of the exhibition *China/Avant-garde*, which was referred to by some hard-liners as a small Tiananmen, because they took Xiao Lu's shooting as the symbolic anticipation of the demonstration. He was prohibited from editing, publishing, lecturing and leaving Beijing. Nevertheless, he was allowed to leave China in 1991 as a visiting scholar, after receiving an invitation from two American universities.[219] Increasing political pressure was evident over the following years. The editors of an art journal were replaced, the *Meishu* journal, which became even more conservative and po-

[219] See further in Gao, Minglu. *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*. MIT Press, 2011, p. 166.

litically oriented, publishing an article about Mao's Yan'an Talks of 1942. At that time, art dealers from abroad started to come to China and in the 1990s international exhibitions focused on selling artworks and auctions began in mainland China. The avant-garde movement of '85 New Wave showed astonishing vitality and had its post-1989 revival, when it started to attract worldwide attention.[220]

The new wave of Chinese avant-garde art first became known to the outside world in the exhibition *China's New Art: Post-1989*, organised by the Hanart T. Z. Gallery in Hong Kong, in January/February 1993. It was an exhibition of some two hundred works by fifty-one Chinese artists. The thematic groupings already indicated certain distinctive features and new art styles, such as "Political Pop," "Cynical realism: Irreverence and Malaise," "The Wounded Romantic Spirit," "Emotional Bondage: Fetishism and Sado-Masochism," "Ritual and Purgation: Endgame Art," and "Introspection and Retreat into Formalism: New Abstract Art." These works are characterised by playfulness, irreverence, irony, wit, cynicism, parody, pastiche, flatness, and comic effect.[221] Nevertheless, '85 New Wave certainly changed the whole atmosphere in Chinese art. Its influence on contemporary oil painting well surpassed the impact it had on the artists involved in ink painting. Abstract art was again in the shadow of an art filled with content. As Sullivan argued:

> Pure abstraction, because of its apparent lack of subject matter, has had little appeal in modern China, and post-1989 abstractionists such as Shang Yang and Wang Chuan tended to express a tension, an inwardness, a sense of mystery or spiritual apartness, that is in itself a comment on the time. At the opposite extreme were the installations of Gu Wenda and Xu Bing, both already famous, to which Chang Tsong-zung gave the trendy label "Endgame Art", although that was hardly adequate for the extremely complex sources of their works. These include an element of social comment and deconstruction for Gu Wenda and a deeper sense of futility and the absurd in the installations of Xu Bing, evoked with such immense and exhausting labour that the art of creating – even of creating something ultimately futile – becomes not only a kind of

[220] Sullivan, Michael, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-century China,* University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1996, pp. 278-279.

[221] Lu, Hsiao-Peng Sheldon. "Art, Culture, and Cultural Criticism in Post-New China." *New Literary History*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1997, p. 114.

ritual but a search beyond illusion for an inexpressible reality that has its roots in Buddhist thought.[222]

The relationship between the Chinese avant-garde movement and contemporary Chinese ink art is complicated. The famous symbol of the Chinese avant-garde exhibition in 1989 in Beijing Gallery was similar to that of a traffic sign for no turning, which can be interpreted as "do not go back" or "do not look backwards" and which can become the symbol of any avant-garde movement.[223] One of the iconic artworks in the exhibition was an installation by Huang Yongping (b. 1954) representing two books of art history after being spun around in a washing machine, a beautiful example of the avant-gardist attitude to tradition.[224] The main aim of the avant-garde was to oppose traditional opinions in Chinese ink painting, ones that were based on thousands of years of tradition, living on copying and repainting ancient artworks, "learning from the masters", repeating the same brushstrokes and trying to find innovations, reform rather than destroy. That attitude caused sterility in traditional Chinese painting, occasionally interrupted by free spirits such as Shitao who claimed that 'the eyebrows of the ancient masters could not grow on my face. The ancient masters' lungs could not fit into my chest.'[225] The meaning of what were, for the time, very radical words was that he was not going to copy ancient artists, as most Chinese painters did, but create his own method. This statement by Shitao became well-known and it shows a similar attitude of rebellion to tradition, rare in Chinese art, but the spirit of the avant-garde is clear. Chinese ink painting desperately needed reform, and abstract painting became a part of it.

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222 Sullivan, Michael, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-century China,* University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1996, p. 279.

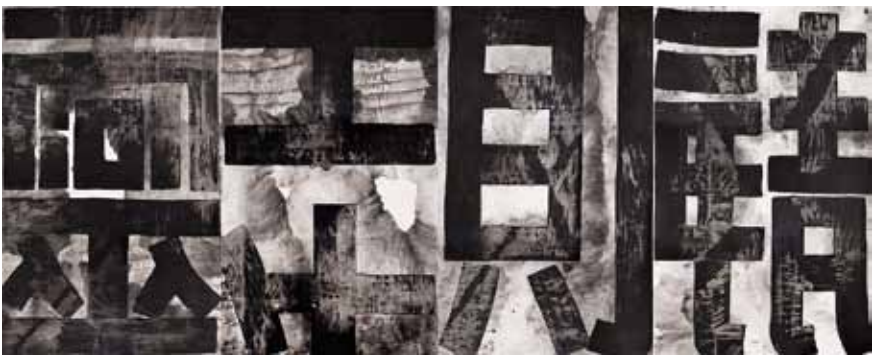
223 Zhangová Daniela. "Premeny čínskeho maliarstva [Transformations of Chinese Painting]". *Výtvarný život / Art Life*, no. 3, 1995, p. 40.

224 Huang Yongping黄永砯 . "Zhongguo Huihua shi" he "Xiandaihuihua jianshi" zai xiyiji li jiaoban le liang fenzhong〈中國繪畫史〉和〈現代繪畫簡史〉在洗衣機裡攪拌了兩分["A History of Chinese painting" and "A Concise history of contemporary painting" spun around in a washing machine for two minutes], installation, 1987, visible at http://collection.sina.com.cn/ddys/2017-07-07/doc-ifyhwefp0250019.html, last retrieved 11 August 2019.

225 Guren de yanjing meimao, bu keneng zhang dao wo de lian shang, guren de feifu, bu neng an ru wo de chang fu zhong古人的眼睛眉毛，不可能長到我的臉上，古人的 肺腑，不能安入我的腸腹中. Shitao石濤. *Hua yu Lu*話語錄*[On Painting].* 中國書畫網*Zhongguo shu hua wang*, http://www.chinashj.com/ysll_ysll/8018.html, last retrieval 11 August 2019.

III. 2. Searching for reform and the New *Literati*

Ink in the minds of Chinese artists used to be and to a degree still is far more than just a medium for painting. It means much more, being connected with thousands of years of tradition, with generations of artists in Chinese art history. In the case of Chinese ink painting, it is impossible to completely disregard its history. It may be one of the reasons why ink painting was relatively under-represented at that exhibition. If the main aim of the new wave in the 1980s was to protest against tradition, the cultural atmosphere after the new wave changed and especially the artists doing ink painting started to point out the importance of the tradition.



Gu Wenda. *United Nations – Babel of Millennium*, 1999, Installation, San Francisco MOMA, photo Piero Scaruffi

In this period, the New Literati movement, which appeals to the tradition of Literati painting, was born. It can be characterised by the revival of Chinese tradition or as 'going back to the roots' as it is known in the Chinese literature. The element it has in common with New Literati, is that its representatives have striven to reform tradition. It is deeply rooted in Chinese culture.

The New Literati movement will only be mentioned very briefly here, as I believe that its contribution to the reformation of contemporary Chinese painting is not the principal value of this movement. More than reforming, this movement continued to paint in the typical Chinese style, with slight innovations, adapting some features of the Western style of painting in their ink paintings, e.g. Western composition without using the empty

space. This style was utilised in ancient Chinese landscape paintings and by other previous Chinese painters, for example in some of the paintings of Xu Beihong or even Li Keran (1907－1989) and it appears in the artworks of the exponents of the New Literati, for example, shadows and dots of watercolour in Tian Liming's (b. 1955) figural compositions etc.

The link between this movement and the true 'Literati' of the past is somewhat vague and not essential. Due to the scarce opportunities of this generation of painters to view and study old paintings, it is doubtful whether ancient masters could truly be their inspiration.[226] Some Chinese art theoreticians also doubted the connections between *literati painting* and *New Literati*.[227] Actually, in the 11th century, when the original *literati's* paintings appeared, they came with revolutionary ideas about painting. They regarded monochrome ink painting not as a representation but as an expression of the author's feelings, their aesthetics.

Although it should be admitted that the New Literati movement has its place in Chinese art history and its exponents mastered brushwork, they are irrelevant to abstract ink painting. The works produced are mostly realistic; they often represented naked women inspired by existentialism, especially by Sartre,[228] an attempt to express physical desires.

It is essential to mention that since the beginnings of abstract ink painting in mainland China, ink in the mind of many Chinese painters was not only a technique; it also used to be the way of thinking. Perhaps because modern Chinese painting is strongly influenced by Western art, ink, as a typically Chinese medium, is for many Chinese painters living in mainland China also a mean of acknowledging their cultural identity, as was pointed out by Gu Wenda. Some of them accept abstraction as something which existed in hidden form in Chinese culture for many hundreds of

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226 Olivová, Lucie. "New Literati Painting", *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture,* http: //contemporary_chinese_culture.academic.ru/560/New_Literati_ Painting, last retrieved 8 June 2016, see also Olivová, Lucie. "New Literati Movement." Davis, Edward L. (editor). *Routledge Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture*. Routledge, 2005, pp. 430-431.

227 See, for example, an article by Zhu Zhongyuan 朱中原. "Xin wenren hua zhende shi xin ma? 新文人畫真的很新嗎 [Is New Literati Painting Really New?]", published on the website 13 January 2015, Zhongguo wenhua bao–Meishu wenhua zhoukan 中國文化報·美術文化週刊 [Chinese Cultural Newspaper–Fine Art and Culture Weekly], http://review.artintern.net/html.php?id=51911, last retrieved 8 June 2016.

228 In the opinion of Xia Kejun, in an interview, 29 August 2019, Beijing.

years, in the lines of calligraphy, in the highly stylised shapes of flowers or scenery in works made by the technique of *xieyi*, some are searching for other, more satisfying words for abstract painting with "Chinese features". As is evident from the previous chapters, purely abstract art, without any hint of reality, did not exist in China before the ideas of Western modernism arrived. After the pioneers of the abstract in painting arose from the flourishing cultural background of the '85 New Wave, new voices of abstraction appeared in the movement of Experimental Ink and Wash.

IV. The Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash and its Relation to Abstract Ink Art

’85 New Wave unquestionably influenced a whole generation of artists, no matter the techniques they used. After a short revival of tradition presented by the New Literati, another movement with strong reform potential and ambitions appeared at the end of the 1980s and ’85 New Wave, the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash. Experiments in ink painting in China had appeared in the period of ’85 New Wave, since Gu Wenda’s ink works. His exploration was far more than a re-evaluation and criticism of tradition. There is no doubt that his bold experiments have opened up new ways to modern forms of ink painting.

Wu Guanzhong. *Chinese City*, 2008, silk screen printing,
Series of prints made after his earlier ink paintings

According to Gu Wenda, the previously used term '*Chinese painting'* (*zhongguo hua*中國畫) developed in China after 1949 under the impact of Western painting; until then the term "painting" was found to be sufficient. This phenomenon is linked to the fact that China began to feel insecure about influences coming from the outside world, and its position in an international context. The weaker the country is, the more it needs a symbol of identity, like a wall built to defend against the outside world, such as the Great Wall of China or a wall that is now being built on the American border with Mexico. A country that feels strong does not need these symbols, and does not need any walls for protection. That is why Chinese ink painting is nowadays becoming an increasingly complicated term, which is taking on too many different meanings.[229] The term 'Experimental Ink and Wash' started to be used as the name of the movement at the beginning of the 1990s. This movement, appealing to experiment as its main creative method, was especially important for the development of abstract ink painting in mainland China.

An important impulse for establishing this movement and for the reform of tendencies in Chinese painting as a whole was the statement by Wu Guanzhong on abstract beauty. He was one of the first important artists in contemporary China to mention abstract art in a positive sense, speaking about formal beauty (aesthetics), and his statements have often been used by painters active in the Movement of 'Experimental Ink and Wash' in order to prove the artistic value of their works.[230] The aim of the discussion was to protest against realism in Chinese art as the dominant, most important model. In another article, Wu Guanzhong even wrote of abstract beauty.[231]

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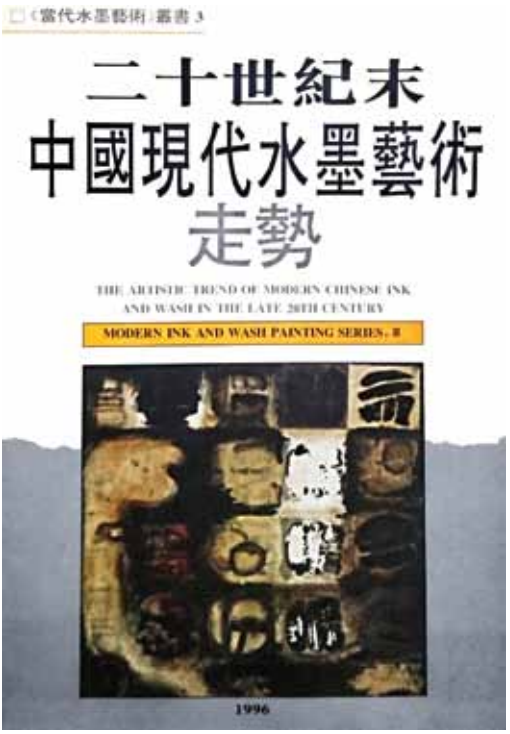
[229] Interview with the artist, Gu Wenda's studio in Shanghai, 8 September 2019.

[230] 美，形式美，已是科學，是可分析、解剖的。對具有獨特成就的作品或作品造形手法的分析，在西方美術學院中早已成為平常的講授內容，但在我國的美術院校中尚屬禁區，青年學生對這一主要專業知識的無知程度是驚人的 [Aesthetics – formal aesthetics – is already a science that can be analysed and dissected. Analyses of the models and methods of successful artists or artworks have long been standard content in Western art schools. But in our nation's art schools, they are still prohibited. The ignorance the young students have about this fundamental knowledge is astonishing!] Wu Guanzhong 吳冠中. "Huihua de xingshi mei 繪畫的形式美 [Formal Aesthetics in painting]", Meishu no. 5, 1979, pp. 33–44. Translation: Michele Wang, in: Wu Hong, Contemporary Chinese Art, Primary documents, MoMa, New York, 2010, p. 16.

[231] Wu Guanzhong 吳冠中. "Guanyu chuxiang mei關於抽象美 [About abstract beauty]", *Meishu* , no. 3, 1981, pp. 37–39.

For decades, new ink art has been in an awkward position. Although it was counted as "experimental" or contemporary art in ink painting circles, it was treated with aloofness by the experimental art world, as demonstrated by the absence of new ink art in the mounting of large-scale exhibitions introducing experimental art. This happened as a result of the emphasis on the alteration of language advocated by most new ink artists, an interrogation of the medium of ink that obviously did not coincide with the questioning of contemporary culture in contemporary art.[232]



The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century. Cover page of the book

[232] Lu Hong. "The Formation and Development of New Ink Art in China." *M Matters | M* 思考, www.mplusmatters.hk/inkart/paper_topic2.php?l=en. Last retrieved 25 January 2020.

In the history of Chinese painting, alongside the emphasis on tradition, there existed voices of reform. These tendencies have occurred so frequently during the long history of Chinese art that it may seem that even the voices calling for reform are part of the tradition's self-sustaining function. After a not very successful attempt to reform Chinese painting by the *New Literati*, the hopes of art critics turned to the movement of 'Experimental Ink and Wash'. Many critics have accepted this movement, such as Pi Daojian, Yi Ying, Yin Shuangxi and others.

Experimental Ink and Wash Painting, 1998, Frontpage of the book

The movement of Experimental Ink and Wash was one of the most active movements in Chinese art of its time. It can be characterised by its main features such as painting on the easel and a strong feeling for abstraction. The artists of Experimental Ink and Wash are searching for a new

logical development. They do not want to import Western art into China directly, but they want to find new directions within their own traditions. Of course, not all artists involved in the movement practiced abstraction, but a number of abstract works or works with strong abstract features were produced by painters connected with the movement. This factor makes it essential in the development of abstract painting in mainland China.

The movement involves several dozen artists, but as mentioned, not all of them created abstract paintings. Any attempt to classify them in different groups or currents is always futile, given that the styles of the artists have changed over time and continue to change. That is the reason why categorisations of Chinese contemporary artists should not be taken too seriously. There is always room for discussion, especially between artists. Besides that, artists change their style and sometimes their affiliations to art groups, therefore the names and labels do not match perfectly. Some of them cease to devote themselves to abstract painting for various reasons, or have only begun to use it.

IV. 1. The beginnings of the movement

The founder of the Movement, Zhang Yu, claimed that Experimental Ink and Wash[233] emerged in the mid-to-late 1990s, from "modern ink painting"[234] to "experimental ink painting"[235], which developed into "modern ink"[236]and finally to Experimental Ink and Wash. This categorisation may be misleading to people from outside China. Zhang Yu explains the main difference between these, from a Western point of view very similar, names. While 'experimental ink and wash painting' includes only two-dimensional works in the traditional format of Chinese painting, experimental ink and wash includes not only ink paintings but also installations and other kinds of three-dimensional art pieces using mostly ink and traditional Chinese *xuan* paper. He believes that leaving out the word *painting* is essential for the definition in Chinese, because he did not want to limit

[233] Shiyan shuimo實驗水墨.
[234] Xiandai shuimo hua現代水墨畫.
[235] Shiyan shuimohua實驗水墨畫.
[236] Xiandai shuimo現代水墨.

Zhang Yu. *Fingerprints in Air 2009.6.19*, 2009, ink on paper, Gallery Guandu, Taibei

artworks to using ink only for two-dimensional objects. [237] The English names of many catalogues, books and almanacs published do not respect the difference between "ink and wash" and "ink and wash painting", which is problematic and increases the confusion for the non Chinese-speaking audience.

Before the movement was formed, artists who later appeared in the movement started to organise exhibitions and publish books. Zhang Yu張羽 (b. 1959) became one of the leading artists of contemporary ink painting in that period. He worked as an editor in a publishing house, which allowed him for more than twenty years to publish work on "modern ink painting", "modern ink" and "experimental ink painting", and on this development of ink painting. Since 1985, he has been planning, creating, and editing the *The World of Chinese Painting – Exploration of Chinese*

[237] An interview with Zhang Yu, 21 October 2014, Shangyuan Gallery, Hangzhou.

Painting series[238]. In 1991, the book *Modern Chinese Ink Painting*[239], planned and edited by Zhang Yu since 1988, was published. The featured artists included Gu Wenda, Zhang Yu, Wang Chuan, Yan Binghui, Shi Hu, Sun Baijun, Liu Zijian and others. That was the first step on the long experimental road of the movement.

> Whenever mentioning abstract ink painting, or the actual Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash, we cannot overlook the painter, art theorist and curator Zhang Yu. His artistic achievements, from a vantage point of continuous development of more than two decades, are somewhat similar to the evolution of the movement. Zhang Yu was one of the founders and organisers of the Movement of the Experimental Ink and Wash and although he presented the views of various other theorists in catalogues dedicated to the movement, it was he who was behind the birth of the movement and theoretical formulation of its main principles.[240]

In 1979 he began to study painting. He came up with the idea to reform ink painting, believing at that time that this could be accomplished through experiment, rather than a return to classical tradition and its renewal. His idea of experimental ink painting was close to the Chinese tradition, as everything that was ever created in the territory of China was consciously or unconsciously in some relationship with the Chinese tradition, but he took a different point of view from the pre-existing artistic movements from the mainland. Zhang Yu was trying to create a modern, internationally accepted, artistic language of ink painting. He realised that Chinese traditional painting, because of its rich cultural frame of reference, was difficult to be fully understood abroad, due to the many allusions to the past, whether technical or content-related. They are comprehensible only with difficulty even by viewers who have a strong artistic flair, but who are not familiar enough with the history of Chinese painting, which uses its own meta-language created by centuries of cultural references and borrowings from the works of the past.

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238 Zhang Yu張羽. *Guohua shijie – Zhongguo hua tansuo*國畫世界—中國畫探索. Series 1 – 4, Tianjin Yang Liuqing huashe, published between 1985 and 1990.

239 Zhang Yu张羽. *Zhongguo xiandai shuimo hua*中國現代水墨畫 *[Modern Chinese Ink Painting]*. Tianjin Yang Liuqing huashe, 1991.

240 An interview with Zhang Yu, 21 October 2014, Shangyuan Gallery, Hangzhou.

Zhang Yu. *Divine Light Series, No. 6: The Floating Broken Square*, 1994, ink on paper

Zhang Yu curated numerous exhibitions in China and abroad. He has been closely connected with the movement since its beginning, helping in organizing conferences and workshops. He is an editor of a series of books on contemporary ink painting at the end of the 20th century and has organised several conferences on the Chinese art of ink, has participated in art workshops in Russia, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and other countries and has co-organised for example an *Encres De Chine Expérimentales* (Lille, 2005) [241] and many exhibitions dedicated to ink painting. Recently he has organised at least one group exhibition concerning ink painting or contemporary art every year.

As a painter, he has had a great number of solo exhibitions and participated in many exhibitions in China and abroad. His early paintings from the 1990s consisted of monochrome ink compositions with titles such as *Dark Sun* or *Divine Light*. In these early works it is possible to observe his typical features; in rejecting brushwork and using a style of dying ink some parallels with Liu Guosong's work can be visible.

[241] Yu Ren郁人. *Encres De Chine Expérimentales / Zhongguo shang mo – dangdai shiyan shuimo zhan*中國 上 墨 • 當代 實驗 水墨展. Pacifica – Paris, 2005.

Regarding Zhang Yu's work, despite its specific style, it has seen a considerable artistic evolution. In his later works he has slowly moved away from ink painting on Chinese paper and presents himself as an avant-garde artist. His new works include installations, performances, works on glass, as well as ink works sometimes created in very specific ways. By the beginning of the 21st century he had created a series of works made on glass, making the impression of his fingerprints on its surface. Some were black, reminiscent of his ink paintings; sometimes he used monochrome colours, such as red or pinkish. An example of his fingerprints as an installation is his *Fingerprints in air 2009.6.19*. The process of fingerprinting is recorded and can be regarded as a kind of performance art, while the results of its performances are semi-transparent works. Although these works do not belong to ink and wash painting, they still have a slight connection with traditional ink painting, which included the technique of finger painting. Finger painting had been used, for example, by Gao Qipei (1660–1734) from the Qing dynasty. Avoiding the reach of tradition is much more difficult for Chinese artists than it might seem, but the approach of Zhang Yu

Zhang Yu. *Divine light Series, No. 71: Floating Incomplete Circle*, 2003, ink on paper

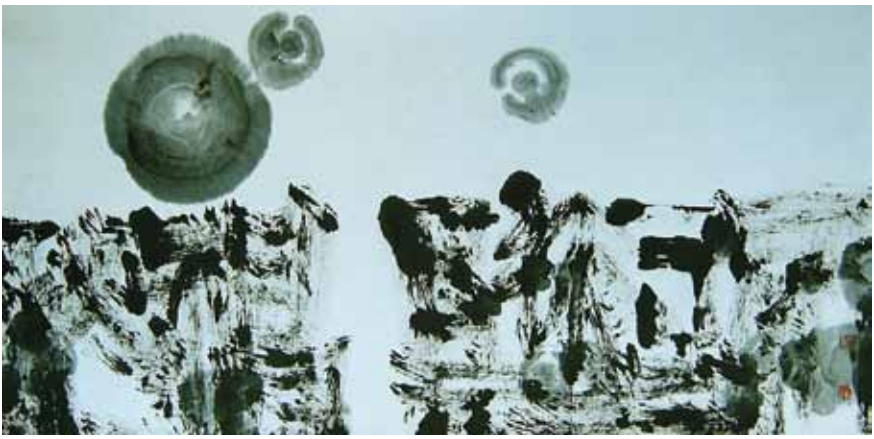
was completely new. He uses fingerprints in a very philosophical sense, not attempting to create any kind of representational painting. His fingerprints present the connection between the human body, mind and time. The experience of printing a part of the body on the paper to prove one's existence in a certain place and time can be a visible artistic manifestation of existentialist philosophy.

Gao Minglu labelled his fingerprints as an example of 'Maximalism'. According to Zhang Yu, his work is quite the opposite of this idea. For Zhang Yu it is mostly a minimalistic approach: in trying to avoid everything unimportant and unnecessary he avoided brushwork. Sometimes he even avoids the use of ink, using only *xuan* paper and water, for its relation to floating time.[242] Zhang Yu's works are often monochrome, some of his fingerprints are imprinted on the glass, sometimes he uses the colour pink instead of ink. In his installations he utilises the specifics of the places, the *genius loci* of the regions, creating them on the spot. He combines the elements of Western and Eastern cultures, which allows his work to more deeply resonate in the minds of a Western public, not very familiar with the slight nuances of Chinese painting, but sensitive to the conceptual plays with space, time, and cultural context. Zhang Yu attempts to create a specific artistic language, coming from Chinese tradition but understandable internationally, to develop his original style.

Zhang Yu in a few words could best be described as a conceptual artist. His work is full of philosophical ideas and is gradually losing the elements of tradition, accustomed ways of thinking and creating new concepts. We can feel the deep thinking about the very nature of art, the nature of the Chinese background and thinking about what actually defines art as national or international; where the boundaries lie… the boundaries between art and experimentation, the art from within or outside of China. Rather than shouts it reminds us of silence, which in the Chinese cultural context finds a parallel in Daoist philosophy.

In his work we discover many connections not only with Daoism, but also with another Chinese philosophy – Chan Buddhism. The artist, however, denies any direct inspiration from this philosophical tradition. According to him, this connection is not due to the fact that he would consciously seek inspiration in traditional Chinese philosophy. Looking back

[242] From correspondence with Zhang Yu, 20 September 2019 via Wechat.



Yan Binghui. *Untitled*, 1990s, ink on paper

at his work Zhang Yu also noticed that his work carries some elements of Chan, but this is due rather to involuntary harmony and the fact that he made his artistic journey, a path similar to the teaching of Chan Buddhism. More important than inspiration is the fact that their paths have crossed and his artistic exploration led him to conclusions similar to those of Zen philosophy; it indicates a similarity of thought processes rather than direct cultural influence.[243] According to Gao Minglu he is a meditative painter, an example of metropolitan Chan meditation.[244]

It is almost impossible to avoid the traces of tradition. On the one hand it carries a continuity of cultural heritage and cultural identity, but on the other it is a dogma, making every movement and innovation difficult and painful. This problem has existed in Chinese ink painting for hundreds of years. Whatever the issue the artists choose, tradition is far more restrictive than one can imagine.

The artist, calligrapher and poet Yan Binghui 閆秉會 (b. 1956) was active in the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash since its beginning, but he started to devote himself to contemporary ink painting before the establishing of the movement. Yan Binghui graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Tianjin, and teaches in his alma mater as a professor. He has

[243] Interview with the artist, 21 October 2014, Shangyuan Gallery, Hangzhou.

[244] Gao, Minglu. *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*. The MIT Press, 2011, p. 388.

Yan Binghui. *Stars*, 1990s, ink on paper

participated in exhibitions on painting and calligraphy since 1985; he belongs to the group of avant-garde artists who participated in the exhibition *China/Avant-Garde* in 1989. He attended a cultural exchange in Sweden and published a collection of his poetry and catalogues on his calligraphy.[245] Since 1985 Yan Binghui has been trying to express some emotions to enable ink painting to reach a spiritual level. For him, the most important thing is the reduction and purity of shape. The artist believes that he can express the whole range of emotions and feelings through the simplicity of the shape. He wants to bring people looking at his works to a state of mind 'above the shapes', a state of abstraction. Yan Binghui's abstract paintings came from the art of calligraphy but they remind us of something Western, monochrome abstract artworks, with the surface covered in a single colour. The author uses only black ink, sometimes enriched with subtle touches of colours, as is possible to see in *Untitled* works from the 1990s. At present he continues to devote himself to experimental ink painting, but apart from abstract ink works he creates ink painting much more connected with the Chinese traditional painting. Both of these seemingly contradictory positions of the artist, traditional painting and abstraction, are linked by his specific style, his brilliant brushwork. His brushstrokes show a deep understanding of tradition, reflected in his works. Perhaps this close connection to the traditional Chinese style of ink painting, by a mere touch of the brush

[245] CV in the materials sent by Yan Binghui to author in 2000.

Shi Hu.
One person,
1989, ink on
paper

on paper, was the reason why some exponents of experimental ink painting rejected brushwork as something that is too linked to the Chinese tradition and therefore constraining.

The representatives of experimental ink painting held a number of large exhibitions and symposia where they presented their works, and published many books and catalogues, such as the series of almanacs *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century*. In the first series, Zhang Yu continued to invite Liu Yuchun to write the prefaces. The featured artists include Zuo Zhengyi, Li Jin, Huang Yizhen, Shi Guo, Fang Tu, Yan Binghui, Zhang Jin, Zhang Yu and Liu Zijian. The series was planned during his solo exhibition and study in Moscow in June 1992.[246]

[246] Zhang Yu: 'The publication of this series of books, from the planning, looking for publishing funds, organizing artists, liaising with critics, editing, proofreading, binding design, and printing were done by me. From 1993 to 2000, a total of five editions were

In 1995, an exhibition *Ink and Light -- exhibition of Contemporary Chinese Abstract Ink and Wash Painting*[247], was held in Flanders, Belgium. The main organiser was Zhang Yu, and the art critic Pi Daojian was invited to make the opening speech. Artists presented there were Jiang Guoliang (b. 1965), Zhang Yu, Zhang Jin, Wang Tiande, Zhu Aiping and Liu Zijian. The artists and their works were presented in the second volume of *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century*.[248]

In 1996, artists around the Movement organised the symposium on *Chinese Ink and Wash: Towards the 21st Century and Exhibition of Viewing and Emulating*[249], which was accompanied by the exhibition in the Art Gallery of South Normal University, Guangzhou. Another exhibition featuring the works of artists was *Returning Home – Collective Exhibition of Chinese Experimental Ink Painting*.[250]

The publishing of the books, considering their content, was not welcomed by conservative art circles. Some problems occurred when the third book of the series was planned. Artists involved in the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash tried to publish the publication presenting their works, but the process of obtaining an ISBN in China was too complicated. They had to wait for one year for the ISBN and it was not legal to publish the book or catalogue without an ISBN. They found the solution to avoiding these administrative hassles by publishing the book *Experimental Ink and Wash Painting of China in the 90's* [251] beyond the reach of the Chi-

edited and published, becoming an important document and academic platform in the development of Experimental Ink and Wash.' Zhang Yu張羽. "Zi shi zhi zhong wo suo canyu de `shiyan shuimo'—zhe chang cheng bu shang yundong de yundong自始至終我所參與的「實驗水墨」—這場稱不上運動的運動[The "Ink Wash" I participated in from beginning to end – this is not a movement]", 28 November 2017, *kknews*, https://kknews.cc/culture/peg9ma8.html. last retrieved 12 October 2019.

247 Mo yu guang. Zhongguo xiandai chuaxiang shuimo墨 與 光 • 中國 現代 抽象 水墨.

248 Zhang Yu张羽ed. *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century /Ershi shiji mo zhongguo xiandai shuimo yishu zoushi*二十世紀末中國現代水墨藝術走勢. Special edition, Belgium, 1995.

249 *Zou xiang ershiyi Shiji de Zhongguo Dangdai Shuimo yantaohui ji zuopin zhan* 走向 二十 一 世紀 的 中國 當代水墨研討會及作品展.

250 *Chongfan Jiayuan – Zhongguo Shiyan Shuimo Lian Zhan*重返 家園 – 中國 實驗 水墨 聯展, USA, 1996.

251 Pi Daojian 皮道堅ed. *Jiushi niandai Zhongguo shiyan shuimo*九十年代中國實驗水墨 */Experimental Wash Painting of China in the 90s*. Hong Kong World Chinese Arts Publication Company Ltd., 1998.

Shi Guo. *Round Object and Packaging, No.1*, 1999, ink on paper

nese autocratic system, in Hong Kong. According to the account by Zhang Yu[252], at the beginning he was supposed to be the editor of the almanac. Pi Daojian became editor as the result of the discussion between Zhang Yu and Liu Yiyuan. The book was printed with the financial support of the

[252] Zhang Yu張羽. "Zi shi zhi zhong wo suo canyu de `shiyan shuimo'—zhe chang cheng bu shang yundong de yundong自始至終我所參與的「實驗水墨」—這場稱不上運動的運動 [The "Ink Wash" I participated in from beginning to end – this is not a movement]", 28 November 2017, *kknews*, https://kknews.cc/culture/peg9ma8.html, last retrieved 18 October 2019.

World Association of Chinese Artists, whose chairman was Yi Mo.[253] Here the discrepancy between the Chinese and English title is visible, as the word *painting* appears only in the English version.

There are some artists involved in the movement who already had a considerable reputation in traditional ink painting. One of those is the famous painter Shi Hu 石虎(b. 1942), who participated in several exhibitions although his connections with the movement seem not that strong. Some of his artworks can be considered as abstract or semi-abstract, but mostly he makes more traditional ink paintings. [254] During his extensive tour to Africa in 1978 he was inspired by the brilliant colours of the exotic cultures and wildlife. The influence of African art can be observed in Shi's aesthetic expression, and led to the creation of the artist's famous "African Sketches." Shi then undertook a serious study of western art, especially Modernism and Abstractionism. He is skilled in painting figures and animals with strong and unique configurations. He uses a "boneless" technique to create strong contrast of bright colour tones and his brushstrokes are bold and strong.[255] Shi Hu's work *One person* presents semi-abstract ink painting in the traditional *xieyi* style.

Another artist who was quite well-known before the movement started is Shi Guo石果 (b. 1953). His artwork appeared at the exhibitions and publications connected with Experimental Ink Painting several times (See *Round Object and Packaging no.1* and *Bone phase study. no.1*). Shi Guo is Vice Dean of Guangdong Zhuhai Painting Academy[256]. His father,

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[253] Pi Daojian 皮道堅ed. *Jiushi niandai Zhongguo shiyan shuimo*九十年代中國實驗水墨 */Experimental Wash Painting of China in the 90s*. Hong Kong World Chinese Arts Publication Company Ltd., 1998.

[254] Shi Hu studied at the Beijing Arts and Crafts College and the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts. He taught at the Beijing Arts Crafts College from 1968 to 1969. In 1977, Shi was employed as art director at the People's Fine Art Publishing House in Beijing. Shi was invited to the United States as a visiting scholar and later settled in Macau. From 1989 onwards, Shi has held exhibitions in the United States of America, Canada and Singapore, and was appointed as Director of the International Chinese Artists Association in Macau in 1996. In 2004, a solo exhibition of Shi Hu was held at the National Arts Museum and later in other Asian countries.

[255] For more information, see the artist's webpage at Artron [cit. 19 November 2019]. "Shi Hu石虎." Shi Hu yishujia jieshao – Shi Hu Guanfang wangzhan-yachang yishujia wang石虎藝術家介紹-石虎官方網站-雅昌藝術家網, shihu.artron.net/about. Last retrieved 25 January 2020.

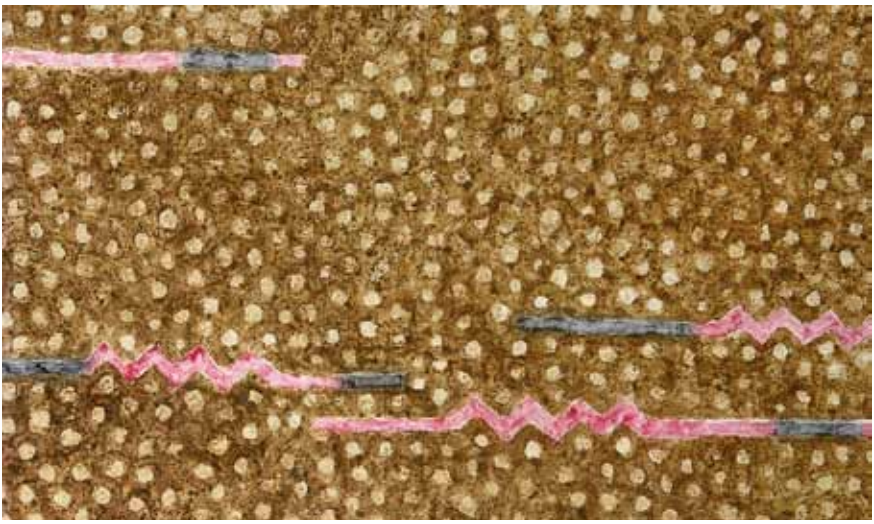
[256] A painting academy 畫院, is not a school but an institution where artists are paid for

Shi Guo. *Bone Phase Study, No.1*, 2001, ink on paper

Shi Lu (1919–1982), was the principal founder of Chang'an Painting School.[257] Shi Guo participated in exhibitions organised by the movement, for example *Returning home -- Collective exhibition of Chinese*

devoting themselves to art. This kind of institution existed in Chinese history under the patronage of the Emperor. There are records of Academy and academic artists from the Tang dynasty. See Sullivan, Michael. *The Arts of China*. (Revised Ed.). Thames and Hudson, 1973, p. 171.

257 In 1982, Shi Guo graduated from the Chinese Painting Department of Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts. Between 1985 and 1990, he was deputy president of the Zhuhai Academy of Painting. He was a professional artist from 1995 to 2004 and the president of the Academy of Design & Art of Beijing Institute of Technology in Zhuhai from 2004 to 2016. Since 2016, he has lived the life of a professional artist again. He has held more than 30 group exhibitions. Information provided by Zhang Yu, 15. 9. 2019. See also "Shi Guo", *Xilin Yinshe auction Co Ltd*, http://test.xlysauc.com:8079/auction5_det.php?id=63812&ccid=499&n=844, last retrieved 7 February 2020.



Sun Baijun. *Extension of Life Series, Ink Work No. 50*, 2016, ink, paper and mineral colours on canvas

experimental ink painting.[258] His ink experiments included three-dimensional works, such as objects made of mud board, using *xuan* paper, rubbing and dyeing. The work presented here was semi-abstract ink painting from 2001. He does experimental semi-abstract paintings alongside painting more traditional ink landscapes. Shi Guo is an excellent example of a famous artist joining the movement despite their work being more traditional than conforming to the bold aspirations of the movement.

Sun Baijun孫佰鈞 (1961 – 2020), who participated in several exhibitions of the Movement, can be picked out as an artist who avoided marked calligraphic features in his abstract artwork.[259]

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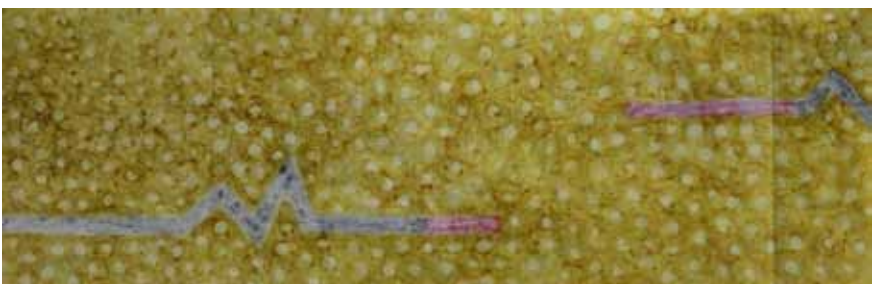
[258] *Chongfan Jiayuan – Zhongguo Shiyan Shuimo Lian Zhan*重返 家園 – 中國 實驗 水墨 聯展, USA, 1996.

[259] Sun Baijun graduated from the Department of Industrial Design of Wuxi Institute of Light Industry (now Jiangnan University School of Design). He worked as a lecturer and associate professor at Shandong Light Industry Art School and now resides in Beijing. Sun Baijun participated in art activities at home and abroad. Currently, he is an associate professor in the Art and Design Department of Zibo Vocational College, a vice president of the China-Korea Art Exchange Association, and a member of the Hudson Artists Association of New York. In 2008, he held several solo exhibitions around the world. He has participated in more than 40 exhibitions in China, South Korea, Japan, and other countries.

Sun Baijun was devoted to abstract painting, but also painted some of his works in a more traditional style. Some of his pictures are semi-abstract, some present parts of human bodies covered in colours. In his abstract work he uses ink and mineral colours, sometimes he uses ink in painting on canvas, but most of his works are closely connected with ink painting. As he says himself:

> I like to use ink to do the work I want to do, to continue with my experiments, to feel excited by the process of creation. Many ideas have not been realised yet. My yellow series has not yet reached the limit, and there is room to improve. The experiment is something I am very interested in. Compared to the traditional dots and lines, contemporary ink painting is a reinterpretation and reconstruction of classical art. It is not a simple work, but a thing with three-dimensional objects. It seems that the landscape is not a concept of mountains and rivers, but I hope that I will build my own landscape based on my ideological aesthetic and aesthetic views.. This is what I am looking for in the experiments in art. [260]

Looking at Sun Baijun's works, they are characterised by composition filling the whole surface of the painting. Ink is complemented by adding mineral colours; the background is made in sepia. Brushstrokes are obscure; the dots which are the crucial part of his art language are painted yellow. They come to the foreground; coloured lines crossing the paint-

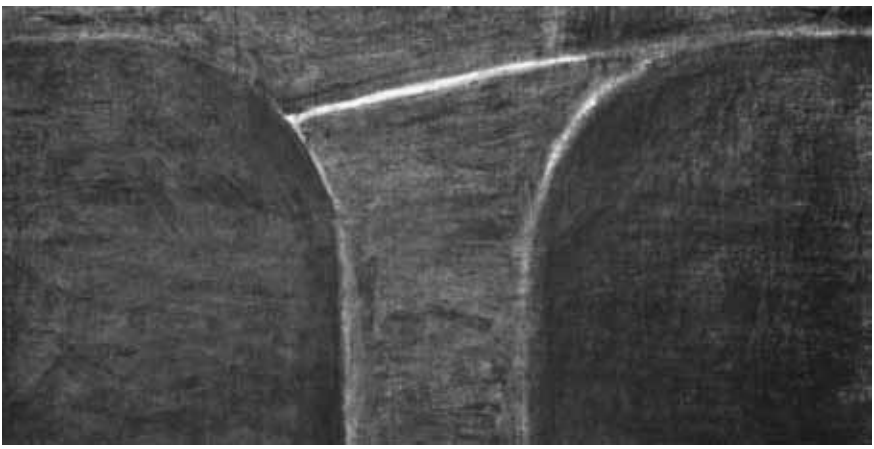


Sun Baijun. *Extension of Life Series No. 52*, 2016, ink, paper and mineral colours on canvas

[260] Hui Zhi慧智 . "Chen Jingdong duihua Sun Baijun沈敬東對話孫佰鈞[Chen Jingdong talks to Sun Baijun]." *Weixin gongzhong pingtai*微信公眾平台*Micro-channel public platform*," mp.weixin.qq.com/s/G91u4TNH9sORxf0dDduU0Q, last retrieved 28 September 2019.

ing with no resemblance to calligraphic strokes. The lines he uses are in contrasting colours, mostly straight, sometimes slightly wavy. The various lines that attract attention are similar to an ECG or graph captured with remarkable accuracy. Colours are usually modest, and only the zigzag lines are made in deliberately contrasting bold colours.

Another painter coming from '85 New Wave is Fang Tu 方土 (b. 1963). He took part in the Movement for a certain time, but now he is not involved in experimental ink painting. Recently he has devoted himself mainly to figural ink painting. Fang Tu is an artist who naturally passed to abstraction thanks to art-theoretical views with 'external (or formal) similarity' often



Sun Baijun. *A Line Drawn through the Arch*, 2017, ink on paper

mentioned in the history of Chinese painting, which is visible from his painting, but in 2000 he claimed that his source of inspiration in doing abstract paintings was coming from traditional Chinese art.[261] His perception of abstraction is based on traditional Chinese feelings, slowly abandoning shape until there are shapes that are simplified by mere symbols such as a circle or other irregular shapes. Fang Tu is using powerful brushstrokes with a semi-dry brush to create the central motif of composition. Like many of the artists mentioned here, he did not continue with abstraction. Nowadays, he focuses on more traditional genres.[262]

[261] Correspondence with Fang Tu, 2000.

[262] Fang Tu graduated from the Chinese Painting Department of the Guangzhou Acad-

Fang Tu. *Heaven and Earth, Part Five (detail)*, 1996, ink on rice paper

For a better understanding of its dynamics, it must be realised that the Movement was far from being consistent; it included not only the members who were clearly claiming their position of modernism and convinced of experimental ink as its long-term artistic direction. For some painters it was nothing but a short period of experimentation with form, a kind of inspira-

emy of Fine Arts in 1986 and worked at the Zhujiang Film Studio in 1986. In 1992, he moved to the Guangzhou Painting Academy. He is a member of the China Artists Association and of the Chinese Painting Art Committee, an executive director of the Chinese Painting Society, the vice-chairman of the Guangdong Artists Association, and the executive president of the Guangdong Chinese Painting Society. See his paintings "Fang Tu方土", *Baidu*, https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%96%B9%E5%9C%9F#5, last retrieved 3 February 2020.

tion for their later achievements in more traditional artistic genres. Fang Tu belongs to this latter category of artists, and he is mentioned here as one of those who followed the movement for a certain time in its infancy.

Another gifted artist who was involved in the movement in 1990s, and is still connected with the people around experimental ink painting, is Wang Tiande 王天德 (b. 1960), a painter, calligrapher, and designer. He has devoted himself to abstract painting since the 1990s, participating in exhibitions in China, including the Experimental Ink and Wash Painting of China in the 90s in Hong Kong in 1998. His works can be found in the volume *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the late 20th Century*. He has participated in a wide range of exhibitions on contemporary ink painting, as well as the above-mentioned exhibition *Encres De Chine Expérimentales* in Lille, in 2005.[263]

Like many of the artists mentioned above, the experimental ink painting of Wang Tiande is only part of his work. In addition to abstract motifs, he continues to devote himself to more traditional forms of Chinese painting with ink, especially landscape painting. He writes calligraphy which also borders on semi-abstract motifs. In his works other than calligraphy he uses more the techniques of dyeing than a strong emphasis on brushwork. His abstract paintings often consist of compositions in the form of a traditional Chinese fan, which lend abstract painting a certain degree of 'acceptability' in the Chinese cultural context. The surface of his huge "fans" are covered by abstract black structures, sometimes, as in the example shown here, there is a little of another colour in small areas of the painting. The composition of the round shape is full and orientated towards the centre of the artwork. The handle of the "fan" is made from a piece of bamboo, situated in the middle of the painting, and divides the painting into two parts. Some parts of the bamboo are covered in black ink, the dominant colour on the almost full paper. On closer inspection it is evident that the artist has used white colour to add some white effects to highlight some parts of the paintings, and the ink is mingled with brown or beige mineral colours.

[263] He organised several solo exhibitions, in Canada (2004), Hong Kong (2005), New York (2007), etc. For more about the artist see "Wang Tiande: Yazhou yishu zhongxin亞洲藝術中心[Asia Art Center]." *Asia Art Center*, www.asiaartcenter.org/asia/portfolio/wang-tiande/?lang=en, last retrieved 3 Feburary 2020.

Wang Tiande. *Round Series – Chinese Fan*, ink, 1996, white colour and bamboo stick on paper

An interesting part of Wang Tiande's abstract work, which is probably affected by his work at the faculty of design, are fashion designs of clothing covered by Chinese characters in abstract or semi-abstract motifs. Sometimes these are true designs showcased on live models, sometimes it is more like a concept painting, whether it is abstract ink painting or highly stylised mountains painted in the shape of traditional Chinese clothes, evoking the earliest discoveries of Chinese textiles from ancient graves. His artistic style has shifted slightly from pure painting to painting on the border between design and fashion, but nevertheless retains its continuity. Some of his fashion models are covered with calligraphy. The shape is mostly simple, similar to traditional Chinese clothes, as the most ancient piece of clothing found in Mawangdui. As was already mentioned here, abstract painting represents a part of Wang Tiande's artistic achievements.

In 1999, Zhang Yu had a discussion with Gao's brothers about the future of experimental ink, and they told him that he should not continue to promote the movement for too long, because he was already about to terminate the movement and abandon ink. But at the same time, Zhang Yu was preparing a series of other exhibitions and publications, so he decided to continue promoting ink.

In 1999, another series was published. It consisted of the eight volumes of *History of Black and White: Chinese Contemporary Ink and Wash 1992-1999*[264]. It included Shi Guo, Yang Zhilin (b. 1956), Zhang Yu, Yang Jinsong, Yan Binghui, Liu Zijian, Zhang Jin, and Wei Qingji. Art critics who wrote the articles in the book were Pi Daojian and Yin Shuangxi.[265] Zhang Yu was mostly responsible for the editing work.[266]

For this movement it is typical that at the time of its inception, many artists devoted themselves to abstract ink painting, which was previously unknown in China and therefore considered as a rarity. It was especially the abstraction that in the Chinese cultural context met with much greater misunderstanding than most of the work of the avant-garde. A significant group of ink painters who sought their way just in abstract and semi-abstract painting was formed within the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash in the 1990s. This movement since its beginnings enjoyed a period of general attention and recognition that can be seen and felt in the many publications that dealt with experimental and modern ink painting, as well as in the reactions and responses to the movement from art-theoretical journals. Some of the artists involved in the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash, in addition to the abstract or semi-abstract paintings, painted or are still painting traditional landscapes and figural themes with ink. Others tend to turn towards Political pop and they sometimes include symbols in their paintings that indicate that direction. For other painters, experimental ink painting or abstraction as such was only a short experimental period, after which they returned to the mainstream.

The Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash attracted the attention of art critics. Many of them had welcomed this substantial new strong group and new art trend, hoping for the reform of Chinese ink painting. As for

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[264] Pi Daojian皮道堅. *Hei Bai Shi: Zhongguo dangdai shiyan shuimo*黑白史：中國當代實驗水墨*1992-1999, [Black and White History: Contemporary Chinese Experimental Ink and Wash 1992-1999],* Hubei meishu chubanshe, Wuhan, 1999.

[265] See more in Pi Daojian皮道堅. *Hei Bai Shi: Zhongguo dangdai shiyan shuimo1992-1999*黑白史：中國當代實驗水墨 *1992-1999 [Black and White history: Chinese Experimental Ink and Wash 1992-1999]*. Hubei meishu chubanshe, Wuhan, 1999.

[266] Zhang Yu張羽. "Zi shi zhi zhong wo suo canyu de `shiyan shuimo'—zhe chang cheng bu shang yundong de yundong自始至終我所參與的「實驗水墨」—這場稱不上運動的運動[The "Ink Wash" I participated in from beginning to end – this is not a movement]", 28 November 2017, *kknews*, https://kknews.cc/culture/peg9ma8.html, last retrieved 18 October 2019.

Zhang Yu. *Fingerprints Floating in the Air (installation)*, 2014, rice paper, plant-based paint, Los Angeles Convention Center

Chinese painting (except for firm traditionalists), there were often voices calling for reform. After the short and unsuccessful movement of the New Literati the attention of art theorists had turned to experimental ink painting. Several art critics adopted a positive attitude to the movement. Some of them became somewhat involved in the movement, such as Pi Daojian, Yi Ying, Yin Shuangxi, and others who wrote texts analysing the development of ink painting and movement in books, almanacs and catalogues related with the movement. Yin Shuangxi claimed:

> 'Experimental ink painting of the 1990s that created the movement is the liveliest of the most significant phenomena in the Chinese art of its time. It can be characterised by painting on the easel and abstract features. These artists are searching for new developments within traditional ink painting. They are not simply trying to directly import Western art, for completing the transformation of Chinese painting with ink towards modernism.'[267]

[267] Yin Shuangxi殷雙喜. "Gazing the Starry Sky: Forms and Concepts/Ningshi fanxing zai xingshi yu guannian zhijian凝視繁星在形式與觀念之間".Pi Daojian 皮道堅ed.

Yi Ying tried to set out an exact definition of experiment as the main feature of the movement and its potential for reforming ink painting: 'Experiment is inherent in the creative process; therefore speaking of experiments in the ink painting actually could suggest unlimited possibilities for the development of ink painting.'[268]

Ink painting as a typical Chinese art technique includes the theories of art and aesthetic principles, which are different from oil painting created in an art-aesthetic universe entrammelled in old rules, limits, techniques, and aesthetic principles that have been formed over centuries, and which ultimately hinder any innovation. That is one of the reasons why Chinese art theorists turn their attention to any new movement promising to bring new trends to the development of ink painting. They are searching for a new starting point to further extend the development and life of ink painting, which has been struggling for at least a century due to a lack of new impulses.

There is one more reason why the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash has attracted so much attention among Chinese art critics and theorists: It was the first art group in mainland China in which abstract painting played a significant role. While their responses to experimental ink painting were generally positive, the opinions of art critics on abstract ink painting were divided. Although it is quite clear that abstract elements have existed in the Chinese fine arts for more than a thousand years, pure abstraction had been rejected in China for various political, socio-cultural and historical reasons.

IV. 2. The debate among artists about using the brush in ink paintings

At the inception of the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash a question arose that for art theoreticians and artists outside the Chinese

*Jiushi niandai Zhongguo shiyan shuimo*九十年代中國實驗水墨 */Experimental Wash Painting of China in the 90s*. Hong Kong World Chinese Arts Publication Company Ltd., 1998, p. 134.

[268] Yi Ying易英. "Possibilities of Experimental Wash Painting/Shiyan shuimo de kenengxing 試驗水墨的可能性". Pi Daojian 皮道堅ed. *Jiushi niandai Zhongguo shiyan shuimo*九十年代中國實驗水墨 */Experimental Wash Painting of China in the 90s*. Hong Kong World Chinese Arts Publication Company Ltd., 1998, p. 136.

cultural context turned out to be quite difficult to understand: to what extent is it necessary to use the brush and calligraphic brushstrokes? Traditional Chinese painting relied for centuries on the specifics of Chinese ink; the skill of the artists consisted in the perfect mastery of technique that has much in common with the art of calligraphy. Unlike the Western perception of calligraphy, calligraphy was considered a high art even above painting, because its origin was traced back to oracle inscriptions on turtle shells, thus having its roots in magic. Some artists, such as Wang Chuan, Yan Binghui, and also later Zhang Dawo and Wei Ligang, who were not involved in the movement but were devoted to ink painting, argued that current Chinese ink painting cannot, or more accurately, should not abandon the Chinese brush and its mastery. Especially the brushstrokes are what make Chinese culture so unique. Some of them call their style False calligraphy (*wei shufa*), or Abstract calligraphy, referring to contemporary – often abstract – ink painting, that is dominated by brushwork. Other artists, such as Zhang Yu and Liu Zijian, were of the opinion that it was necessary to break free from the old traditions and that new ink art should progress further through experiment and it was necessary to avoid the calligraphic brushstroke. There were also those who looked upon the whole issue from their own perspective, such as other avant-garde artists. Wei Qingji, who uses such a technique, admits not being interested in this issue. Others change their style when they feel it is necessary and they can be inclined to any of the opinions above at different times in their artistic life.

Liu Zijian. *Bird's Footprints*, 2009, ink on paper

As has been previously mentioned, Zhang Yu is one of the artists who consistently avoid in his work calligraphy lines and even any outlines that are made with ink in his work. Since 1991 he has abandoned the idea of reform with ink and brush paintings. Since then, he continues to stand by his opinion, according to which brushstrokes are linked with the Chinese tradition to such an extent that he avoids them in his work on purpose. His aim is to break free from tradition.

The debate about using or not using a brush, or how many strokes should be used is still important to experimental artists in China dealing with ink. The questions of what is essential to painting are "how to keep the spirit of ink painting without being constrained too much by tradition?" And, "how much tradition should be safeguarded?" All these problems and many others resonated in the minds of Chinese artists during the 1990s. Some of them are still waiting for answers. Any idea of sorting painters according to their attitude towards using brushstrokes is destined to fail, because there is too much uncertainty. However, their opinions differ from the opinions of art theorists. Besides that, artists often tend to change the style of their works. Therefore, the decision to follow a chronological order was taken. The main criteria are how they appeared on the art scene of abstract ink painting. It is apparent that every categorisation brings exceptions; therefore, all sorting should be understood very loosely.

While speaking about artists who abandoned the brush, we should not forget Liu Zijian劉子鍵 (b. 1956), connected with the movement of Experimental Ink and Wash in the 1990s, and who also represents their ideas.[269] Li Zijian's approach is to avoid the slightest traces of brush and to adopt the techniques used in Western painting such as spraying, splashes, dyeing and

[269] In 1983 Liu Zijian graduated from Hubei Art Academy, majoring in Chinese painting and started to teach there. In 1992 he moved to the Fine Arts Department of South China Normal University and in 1997 to the Fine Arts Department of Shenzhen University. Liu Zijian is currently a professor in the Fine Arts Department of Shenzhen University, a master's tutor, a senior researcher at the China Interior Design Institute, the vice president of the China New Ink Art Academy, and a researcher at the urban ink research department under Fine Art Museum of Research Institute of Traditional Chinese Painting. He has participated in more than fifty exhibitions in China and abroad. He has participated in several exhibitions of Experimental ink painting, and many ink painting exhibitions. See further in: "相關藝術家." 重慶長江當代美術館 - 相關藝術家-詳情, www.changjiangart.com/artist/detail/19. Last retrieved 25 January 2020.

Liu Zijian. *Glorious-30*, 2017, ink on rice paper

frottage. He uses his own artistic language, avoiding the Chinese composition with empty spaces in painting, as well as brushwork, which is typical of traditional Chinese ink painting. His paintings are more reminiscent of Western composition since he uses the techniques of washes, collage, and aquarelle. Dark ink is in contrast with light tones of ink. The whole impression of his work is a very sombre, dark space, loneliness, ruins, as if he is showing us the world after a catastrophic war in which people have been defeated by machines. In his paintings we can see hard edges and the composition is derived from formalism. He belongs to a small group of painters who since the late 1990s until today maintain their own way of painting. Although the development of his personal style is visible, his works are without any doubt recognizable due to their continuality; they still keep their specifics. He is one of the painters who refuse brushwork as something too strongly connected to tradition. His composition is more like the western style of painting than the traditional Chinese feeling of emptiness. Sometimes fragments of Chinese characters are visible in his works, but the characters look more like ancient clerical scripts *(lishu)* written on the stones printed on the surface, there being no obvious traces of a brush. Liu Zijian himself commented on his work:

> Life from birth carries a process leading to an end. The accumulation of the process of life consists of fragments of memory, memories. One day, a man stretches out his hand; all his bits of memory fly into space. Man's coming

and going, and this chaotic universe, are an eternal mystery. My art draws inspiration from this, but when I want to express these memories, my soul gains inspiration in the flow of ink and black silence.[270]

When looking at his more recent pictures, we see a shift, but we recognise the artist's unmistakable imprint. This painter still devotes himself to abstract painting. His recent works have lost the darkness of the artworks created in the 1990s. The edges are slightly abraded, the pictures appear more organic, but he consistently avoids brushwork. He is one of the artists who use other techniques to express themselves, rejecting the brush as something that would make him too strongly affiliated to tradition. In his new works nevertheless there also appear from time to time typical Chinese compositions working with the phenomenon of emptiness as an expressive element.

Liu Zijian. *Overflow of Heaven*, 2018, ink on rice paper

[270] Liu Zijian劉子建. "Zi su自诉[About me]". Li Luming李路明(editor). *Dongfang lixiang zhuyi Liu Zijian* 東方理想主義劉子建 *[Eastern Idealism Liu Zijian]*. Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999, p. 5.

Wang Tiande. *Work No 2 in Progress*, 2007

A propos the importance or unimportance of using brushwork in contemporary ink painting, there are other opinions rather different from those mentioned above. One interesting example of (not) using the brush in calligraphic style is the prominent painter Zhang Hao 張浩 (b. 1962).[271] He expressed his opinions on the importance or unimportance of ink and brush. Although his paintings are not executed in a fast calligraphic style, he stressed the importance of the brush as something essential to Chinese culture.

[271] In 1985 Zhang Hao graduated from the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Art (now the Chinese Academy of Fine Art). He participated in many exhibitions, such as *Dao of Nature – Exhibition of abstract Chinese art* in the Gallery of Contemporary art, Shanghai in 2011*, Great image is without shape – Exhibition of abstract Chinese art*, the Chinese Art Museum, Beijing, in 2010, *The way of abstraction – collective exhibition of the paintings and statues on both sides of the border*, Shanghai Museum of Oil Painting and Sculpture, Shanghai, 2011, *Big exhibition of Ink and Wash – the third kind of abstraction*, Contemporary gallery of Toronto, Shanghai. Based on the information sent by Zhang Hao. September 2019.

If we abandon the brush, what will remain to us? Ink and the brush represent the true spirit of Chinese painting. Ink without the brush would lose its power. There are many countries in the world where they use ink, but only Chinese culture is deeply connected with the both of them.[272]

Zhang Hao. *A Memory of my Hometown*, 2018, ink on paper

Zhang Hao. *A Way of Enlightenment in a Bavarian Gothic Cathedral*, 2019, ink on paper

In Zhang Hao's works, he avoids the typical calligraphic strokes, paints slowly, and thanks to the fantastic control he has using the brush, gives us the impression that his black-and-white shapes are cut out of paper. All we can see in his artworks is a close-up view of the delicate boundaries between white paper and black contours, the darkness of which is gently disturbed by tiny white uncoloured spots, situated with a great sense of composition and exceptional feeling for detail. As Wu Liang says, 'Zhang Hao does not necessarily worship any religion. From his diary, I saw how he approached the metaphysical, emotional, natural, religion and his preferred affirmative experience through different paths. His paintings are simple black and white, purist, minimalist, drawing inspiration from the shapes and feelings of Western cathedrals and spirituality.'[273]

[272] An interview with the artist on 8 September 2019, Wuyong Gallery, Shanghai.

[273] Wu, Liang吳亮. "Wu Liang ping – Zhang Hao de heise shuxie吳亮評--張浩的黑色書寫. [Wu Liang's comment-Zhang Hao's black writing]" *Weixin gongzhong pingtai*" 微信公眾平台, 13 July 2019, mp.weixin.qq.com/s/an-OMhn4-AOpt_HiCIvn1w?fbclid=IwAR2Wyd4bDXvYXdAgKAoa5lo-UcFvWr32jeuL5pDXMhhlCVps8Go0ud5NJEs, last retrieved 25 January 2020.

Despite the first impressions of calligraphy, Zhang Hao's paintings are not formed by robust calligraphic brushstrokes. He takes his inspiration from Western mysticism, and his shapes are driven by the shapes of Gothic and Baroque cathedrals, as is possible to see in his painting *A Way of Enlightenment in a Bavarian Gothic Cathedral*. At our meeting, he expressed his wish to exhibit in European churches or cathedrals to pay homage to his inspiration by European architecture. His works are not created by rapid brush movements; on the contrary, his style is slow, instead of crazy calligraphic brushstrokes made in a sudden burst of inspiration.

Chen Tiejun. *Trees and People*, 1994, ink and colours on paper

Chen Tiejun 陳鐵軍 (Chen Laotie 陳老鐵, b. 1956) is one of the artists active in the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash. Initially he was involved in calligraphy, landscape and figurative painting but inspired by surrealism he now creates abstract ink paintings and organises exhibitions of ink painting with expressionistic features. In 1995 he participated in the Venice Biennale. Chen Tiejun often uses destruction as creative process; he combines soft and hard materials to achieve his personal style of painting.[274] He disagrees with painters who reject brushwork in ink painting. He believes that developing ink painting will not break his relation with traditional ink painting, in which brushwork is central.

[274] For more information see "Chen Laotie Yishu shangxi陳老鐵 藝術賞析 [Enjoying and analyzing Chen Laotie's art]." *Zhongguo huajia wang*, m.huajia.cc/hj.php?id=112991, last retrieved 20 January 2020.

Unlike others, the ink painter Chen Tiejun does not avoid bright colours in his paintings. Besides black ink, he often uses bright red or tones of violet. While the tones of red to most art critics evoke violence, fighting, and destruction, other emotions not so depressing or dramatic can be found. Sometimes red together with blue or green, gives a lyrical feeling, like "plum blossoms" (*meihua* 梅花), peonies or other flowers often used in traditional Chinese painting. He is to some extent related to Western Abstract expressionism. Some of his paintings cannot in a strict sense be called ink paintings, as he uses acrylic colours on *xuan* paper. A part of his artwork is figurative.

Chen Tiejun. *Red Tree No. 2*, 1995, colours on paper

Wei Qingji. *Attributes of Memory No. 2*, 1999, ink and mixed materials on paper

In recent years Chen Tiejun has switched to abstract oil paintings. His style of abstract painting has not changed much. He continues to paint traditional figurative motifs in ink. This example also shows that the boundaries between ink and oil paintings, considered in the 1990s as well-defined, are in the eyes of some contemporary artists gradually blurring.

Wei Qingji 魏青吉 (b. 1971) was one of the youngest artists involved in contemporary ink and the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash. He is currently an Associate Professor at the College of Fine Arts, South China Normal University, Guangzhou, China.[275] His understanding of ink

[275] In 1995, Wei Qingji graduated from the Chinese Art Department, Nankai University, Bachelor of Arts. In 2003, he graduated from the Mural Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, as a Postgraduate. In 2006, he was awarded the Dr. Joseph K.W. Li Arts Fellowship, Asian Cultural Council, Hong Kong. Finally, in 2008, he graduated from the Wuhan University of Technology, College of Art and Design, as Master of Arts. He has participated in more than one hundred group exhibitions around the world, for example, *Ink, Not Ink*, Shenzhen Art Museum, /Today Art Museum, Beijing, 2008, *Ink, Not Ink*, Drexel University, Philadelphia, U.S.A /Museum of Warsaw Royal Castle, Poland / Romanian Museum of Modern Art, Romania, 2009, *Ink, Not Ink*, Sculpture Museum of Science and Art Academy, Croatia, 2010, Expression of Chinese Contemporary Art, Today Art Museum, Beijing, 2011, *Contemporary Ink and*

painting, as he claimed in 2000, is a bit different from that of most artists mentioned here. Wei Qingji avoided participating in the discussions about using or not using the brush. He saw ink painting in a freer way.

> In my latest paintings I am coming from the essence of art. I want to create a new language of ink painting. For me, ink is neither the way to express my origin or a weapon in the battle between different cultures. This is my natural choice, just because I like ink painting and I am good at using this medium. I would like to give to my works the appeal of humanism. Painting is for me the account of my personal experiences, feelings, ideas, reminiscences, as well the account of new imaginings, personal emotions, unconscious and historical traces, and there is also sex and passion.[276]

Wei Qingji, unlike other painters, never had the problem of accepting or rejecting Western or Eastern culture, tradition or modernism. He just naturally used his own favourite medium, his way of creating, using collage, white colour on big spaces, sharp pencil lines, sprays evoking the feeling of freshness. Wei Qingji uses a mix of western and eastern techniques, in which we can sometimes see the inspiration of Antoni Tàpies or Jackson Pollock, or he returns to the traditional composition of Chinese ink painting, using emptiness as a significant component. His paintings, such as *Way of Restoring Memory No.3* show what contemporary ink painting is capable of—free of all discussions, fresh and full of pure joy of painting.

Wei Qingji, as well as his teacher Zhang Yu, is an artist who crossed the borders between contemporary ink painting and Chinese avant-garde art or, to put it better, offers the image of contemporary Chinese art as it is known in the international context. This gives him similarities to Xu Bing

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Wash in Guangdong, Guangdong Museum of Art, China, 2011, *Ink Agreement-China Contemporary Ink Painting Experiments*, Shanshang Art Space, Shantou, China, 2011, *Conceptual Ink,* Feizi Gallery, Shanghai, China, 2011, *Ink Art, A world Without Rules*, !28 Art Space, Shanghai, China, 2011, Contemporary Chinese Ink Painting Joint Exhibition, VA Gallery, Hong Kong, 2012, *Re-ink*, Hubei Museum of Art, Wuhan, China, *Ink · New Art*, The European headquarters of the United Nations, Geneva/ Swiss Art Exhibition Center, Basel, Swiss, 2012, *Beyond Representation – An Exhibition of Chinese Contemporary Art*, Bank of China Tower, Hong Kong, 2012, *Ink*： *The Art of China*, Saatchi Gallery, London, England, 2012, and many others.

276 "Wei Qingji". Yi Mo一墨 (ed). *One Hundred Outstanding Artists/Jingying yishujia bai ren ji* 精英藝術家百人集. Shijie huaren yishu chubanshe, 2000, p. 120.

Wei Qingji. *Way of Restoring Memory No.3*, 1996, ink and mixed materials on paper

and Gu Wenda's installations and performances when dealing with ink. He has combined traditional ink wash painting with acrylic colours. He often exhibits his works in private galleries, such as the Red Gate Gallery, because the diversity of his style, suits their conception. He is an artist who did not go back to tradition after leaving the path of experimental ink painting. His later ink paintings (for example, *Occupation of Paramount Mountain 2*, pg. 245) incorporates elements of pop-art, politic pop, and something which is not very often seen in Chinese art circles, as ink painters usually try to avoid any political content in their works. On the other hand, there are artists whose artworks are closely connected to calligraphy.

A propos the dilemma many artists face here, as to whether to use calligraphic brushstrokes or avoid them, it must be admitted that it is hard for someone without a Chinese cultural background to grasp the depth of feeling about this subject. It is not the purpose of this research to take one or other of the strongly opposing sides. On the contrary, the aim is to point out that in terms of the artistic value of the work, this issue is secondary. However, over time, and through close analysis of many contemporary Chinese abstract ink paintings, it is becoming obvious how many potentially conscious and involuntary associations with tradition can be hidden in just a single ink stroke, or even in one single dot applied on Chinese paper. Therefore, it is understandable why some artists, in order to avoid part of the tradition, abandoned brushstrokes as a means of expression. Because they consider brushstrokes something too closely linked to traditional painting, and thus constricting. For artists or people familiar with Chinese painting or Chinese calligraphy it is possible to see the traces of ancient times by looking at a simple outlined line. Although the opinion of these artists should not be taken as the exclusive solution to the problem of escaping from the tradition or delivery from its grasp as the alternative is equally viable, the reasons that led artists such as Zhang Yu to their present approach should be considered.

IV. 3. The development of the movement after 2000 and the end of the movement

In 2001, an exhibition in Guangzhou called *20 Years of Experimental Ink Painting*[277] was held. The catalogue was published under the title *1980-2001 China: 20 Years of Ink Experiment*.[278] In 2001, Lu Hong organised an exhibition *In the name of ink – Exhibition of contemporary art.*[279] In

[277] Shiyan suimo 20 nian實驗水墨20 年.

[278] 1980-2001 Zhongguo shiyan 20 nian 1980-2001中國水墨試驗20年.

[279] *Yi shuimo de mingyi – danddai yishuzhan* 以水墨的名義——當代藝術展, Shenzhen, 2001. According to Zhang Yu, when he started to plan the exhibition, he asked the Gao brothers to participate in it, but after Lu Hong was asked to become the curator, he changed the conception of the exhibition and did not include Zhang Yu and the Gao brothers. According to Zhang Yu張羽. "Zi shi zhi zhong wo suo canyu de `shiyan shuimo'—zhe chang cheng bu shang yundong de yundong自始至終我所參與的「實驗水墨」—這場稱不上運動的運動[The "Ink Wash" I participated in from beginning

August 2002, Zhang Yu, Yin Shuangxi and the others organised an international *Exhibition of Chinese Experimental Ink and Wash*[280] which started in Shandong province in Yantai, continued in Beijing, Tianjin, Qingdao, then Boston USA, and in Canada. The duration of the exhibition tour was two years, 2002-2003. The organisers included the Art association of Peking University, Qingdao Exhibition Centre of Chinese Art association, the Red Gate Gallery, and galleries in the USA and Canada.[281] In 2005, there was an exhibition called *Review of Experimental Ink and Wash Painting 1985--2000*[282], also the exhibition *Encres De Chine Expérimentales*[283].

The organisers printed catalogues on a variety of materials. Apart from the series of almanacs, *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the late 20th Century*[284], and an almanac of eight volumes *Black and White History: Contemporary Chinese Experimental Ink and Wash 1992-1999*,[285] other books were published. In 2002, in order to continue to extend the influence of experimental ink and ink wash, Zhang Yu undertook publishing work, planning and editing a series of *Open Experimental Ink and Wash*[286] which was published in Hong Kong. The book includes works by twenty-eight Chinese artists from living in and outside of China. In the

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to end – this is not a movement]", 28 November 2017, *kknews*, https://kknews.cc/culture/peg9ma8.html, last retrieved 18 October 2019.

280 Zhongguo shiyan shimo yishu zhan中國實驗水墨藝術展.

281 Chief Curator: Zhang Yu, Canadian Curator: Ma Fu, Academic Chair: Yin Shuangxi, Organisers: Society of Modern Art, Peking University, Exhibition Centre of Chinese Artists Association in Qingdao, the Red Gate Gallery, Jingquan Gallery in Boston, and Maslak Gallery in Canada. The exhibition was held in 10 cities including Beijing, Tianjin, Yantai, Qingdao, Zibo, Boston, Toronto, between 2002 and 2003 (the exhibition in Shandong area was organised thanks to the efforts of Sun Baijun). Participating artists: Shi Guo, Yang Zhilin, Zhang Yu, Liang Quan, Liu Zijian, Zhang Jin, Pan Ying, Sun Baijun, Wei Qingji, and the others, including some Chinese artists living abroad.

282 *Shiyan Shuimo Huigu Zhan*實驗 水墨 回顧展*1985-2000*, Shenzhen Art House, 2005.

283 *Zhongguo shang mo – dangdai Shiyan Shuimo Zhan* 中國 上 墨 • 當代 實驗 水墨, Lille, September 2005.

284 Zhang Yu (Yu Ren郁人) ed. *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century /Ershi shiji mo zhongguo xiandai shuimo yishu zoushi* 二十世紀末中國現代水墨藝術走勢, Modern Ink and Wash Painting Series, I, Yang Liuqing huashe, 1993; II Yang Liuqing huashe, 1995; III, Heilongjiang meishu chunabshe, 1996; 4, Heilongjiang meishu chunabshe, Harbin, 2000.

285 Pi Daojian皮道堅. *Hei Bai Shi: Zhongguo dangdai shiyan shuimo*黑白史：中國當代實驗水墨*1992-1999, [Black and White History: Contemporary Chinese Experimental Ink and Wash 1992-1999],* Hubei meishu chubanshe, Wuhan, 1999.

286 Kaifang de Zhongguo shiyan shuimo開放的中國實驗水墨.

Wei Qingji. *A Stone from Taihu Lake*, 2010, ink and mixed materials on newspaper

series he invited other scholars outside artistic circles to participate in the project, but their analysis ultimately went unused. In 2004, the monograph *Chinese Experimental Ink and Wash 1993 – 2003*, with an extensive collection of documents, represented the maturity of experimental ink-and-wash works. We can see the results of ten years of development from the movement. In this book, apart from well-known names, Shi Guo, Yang Zhilin, Zhang Yu, Zhang Jin, Fang Tu, Liu Zijian, Wei Qingji, and Sun Baijun, a few new artists appeared, such as Liang Quan and Pan Ying.[287]

In 2005, another stage in the evolution of experimental ink and wash was reached with the exhibition *The Quality of Materiality: Experimental Ink and Wash*[288]. That was the first time that the meaning of experimental

[287] Pi Daojian皮道堅. Zhongguo shiyan shuimo 1993 – 2003中國實驗水墨1993—2003/ Chinese Experimental Ink and Wash 1993 – 2003, Heilongjiang meishu chuabanshe, Harbin, 2004.

[288] The exhibition The Quality of Materiality: Experimental Ink and Wash/Zhixing: Shiyan shuimo baogao質性：實驗水墨報告 held in Tianjin. The catalogue from the exhibition was published. See Guo Yaxi, Zhang Yu郭雅希,張羽(editors). *Zhixing: Shiyan*

ink was extended from painting into two-dimensional works, performance art, photography and installations. The exhibition presented Zhang Yu's research and his understanding of what can be included in experimental ink and where those bold experiments lead. The organization and planning of the exhibition was carried out carefully. According to the theme of the exhibition, the works of the chosen artists were displayed, explained and analysed. The critic Guo Yaxi was asked to write an appropriate essay on "quality". The publication marks an important turning point into the far-reaching and extensive experiments featuring ink and wash.[289]

In June 2007, the exhibition *Traces and temperament* [290] was held in the Red Gate Gallery, Beijing. In November of the same year an exhibition featuring three artists, Zhang Yu, Liu Xuguang and Liang Quan, *Without Shape*, was organised in Beijing, 798 Artzone.[291] In August 2008, Zhang Yu, Li Huasheng and Liang Quan had a collective exhibition *Ink ≠ Ink Painting: Art Exhibition of Zhang Yu, Li Huasheng Liang Quan*[292] in Hejingyuan gallery in Beijing. At this exhibition Zhang Yu exhibited his three-dimensional artworks, too.

Li Huasheng 李華生 (1940 – 2018) who participated in this exhibition, started to be active at the time of '85 New Wave. Before embarking on his exploration of processual abstraction, Li Huasheng was widely recognised as one of the pre-eminent traditional landscape artists of his generation. [293]

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*shuimo baogao*質性：實驗水墨報告 / *The Quality of Materiality: Experimental Ink and Wash.* Hubei meishu chubanshe, Wuhan, 2005.

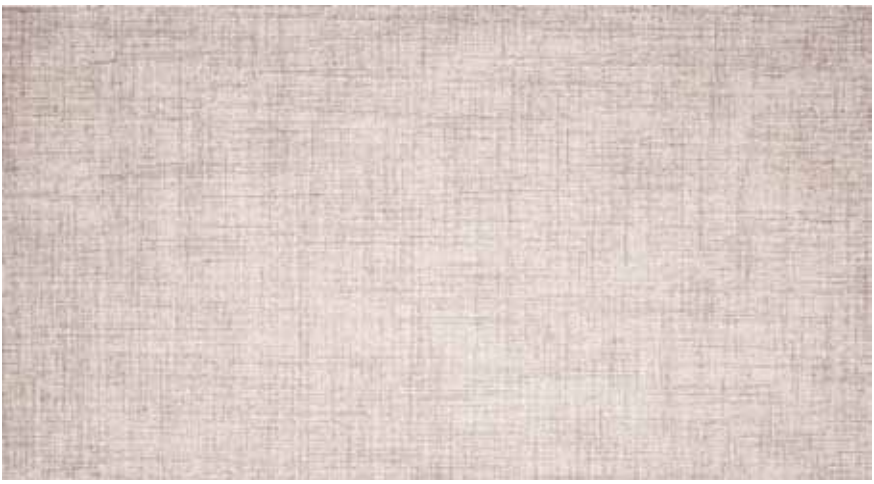
289 Zhang Yu張羽. "Zi shi zhi zhong wo suo canyu de `shiyan shuimo'—zhe chang cheng bu shang yundong de yundong自始至終我所參與的「實驗水墨」—這場稱不上運動的運動[The "Ink Wash" I participated in from beginning to end – this is not a movement]", 28 November 2017, *kknews*, https://kknews.cc/culture/peg9ma8.html, last retrieved 18 October 2019.

290 Hengji yu qizhi痕跡與氣質.

291 "Wu xing zhi xing, Zhang Yu, Liang Quan, Liu Xuguang lianzhan 無形之形, 张羽、梁铨、刘旭光联展 [Shape without Shape, collective exhibition of Zhang Zu, Liang Quan and Liu Xuguang]" *Artron*, https://exhibit.artron.net/exhibition-3825.html last retrieved 18 October 2019.

292 "Shuimo≠shuimohua: Zhang Yu, Li Huasheng, Liang Quan yishu zhan 水墨≠水墨畫：張羽、李華生、梁銓藝術展 [Ink and Wash ≠ Ink and Wash Painting: Zhang Yu, Li Huasheng, Liang Quan Art Exhibition]." *Artlinkart*, http://www.artlinkart.com/cn/exhibition/overview/844fzwu, last retrieved 18 January 2020.

293 Li Huasheng was featured in the national exhibition of China's ten leading contemporary artists in the National Art Museum of China, Beijing (1981), the Contemporary Chinese Painting exhibition that toured eight museums across the United States (1983-



Li Huasheng. *0506*, 2005, ink on paper

His travels in the United States profoundly changed Li Huasheng's attitude to life and his approach to the painting he was doing. He travelled there without being able to communicate in English, and he found the experience liberating. After he returned to China, he was unable to continue with the traditional style of painting. He started to travel to the Himalayas, which deeply attracted him to spirituality and the region's unique, remote beauty. Life in the Himalayas gave him a new inspiration in his painting. His style changed radically.

> During his travels, Li frequently stayed overnight in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and woke, in the early hours, to the rhythmic sounds of the resident monks chanting their morning prayers. It then occurred to him that the way he would paint the Himalayas was not by depicting their outward form but by recording his state of mind while living amidst the mountains themselves.

1985), and the exhibition Tradition and Innovation that was held in several places, notably the Hong Kong Museum of Art, Singapore Art Museum, the British Museum, London, and the Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst Köln, Germany (1995). During this time, Li also travelled outside of China where he held solo exhibitions at Harvard University, Yale University, the University of Michigan, the University of Washington (1987) and at the National Museum of Singapore (1992). For more about the artist see "Li Huasheng 李華生." *Ink Studio*, www.inkstudio.com.cn/zh/artists/70-li-huasheng/overview/. Last retrieved 20 October 2019.

> By 1998, this insight had led Li Huasheng to develop an entirely new, unprecedented practice as an ink artist: While in a disciplined, meditative state, Li would hand-limn vast grids of horizontal and vertical lines. Li deployed each line in a state of meditative concentration, so that any minor fluctuations were directly attributable to fluctuations in *qi*, or the vital energy of his body and mind. This practice occupied him for over a decade.[294]

Since 2000, Li Huasheng has participated in many major exhibitions of contemporary Chinese ink painting, particularly abstract ink painting.[295] His abstract ink paintings present a series of vertical and horizontal lines that create a kind of raster similar to the structure of canvas or other fabric. This technique was inspired by the meditative experiences he gained during his stay in the Himalayas. In these paintings we can see his horizontal and vertical lines in a pattern similar to canvas. The meditative feeling is very strong; the long lines covering the whole surface of the paper serve as a demonstration of his tranquillity.

Contemporary Chinese ink painters sometimes return to the tradition of *literati* painting when they write about their own works, as *literati* painters did many years before. It is evident in the case of Zhang Yu, but other artists have also expressed their opinions. The positive thing is that painters can define the possibly hidden meaning of their paintings more spontaneously than anyone else. On the other hand, art theorists can see the artworks in the wider context of international or historical connotations.

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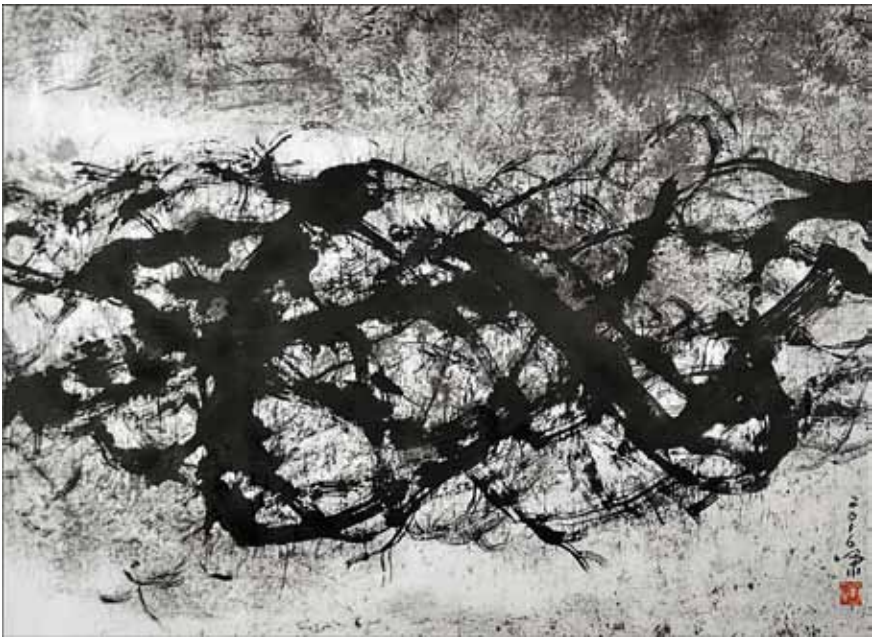
294 "Li Huasheng 李華生." *Ink Studio*, www.inkstudio.com.cn/zh/artists/70-li-huasheng/overview/. Last retrieved 20 October 2019.

295 He participated in big exhibitions organised by Gao Minglu and other important art critics and curators, such as "Chinese Maximalism" at the China Millennium Monument in Beijing and the UB Anderson Gallery at the University of Buffalo in New York (2003); Prayer Beads and Brush Strokes at Beijing Tokyo Art Projects, Beijing (2003); *Yi Pai: Thirty Years of Chinese Abstraction* at the Wall Museum in Beijing and La Caixa Forum Palma de Mallorca, Barcelona, and Madrid, Spain (2008); *Yi Pai at the Today Art* Museum in Beijing (2009); *Ink and Paper-Exhibition of Contemporary Chinese Art* at the Guangdong Museum of Art and the Kunsthalle in Weimar, Germany (2005); Korean-Chinese Contemporary Ink Painting at the Seoul Museum of Art, South Korea (2005); *Ink and Wash Narrative* at the Yokohama Art Project in Yokohama, Japan (2007); Form, Idea, Essence and Rhythm at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum (2008); and *Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (2013). See more in "Li Huasheng李華生", *Ink Studio*, https://www.inkstudio.com.cn/artists/70-li-huasheng/overview/, last retrieved 28 January 2020.



Liu Yuyuan. *Observation by Brush*, 2016, mixed materials on paper

We can see a certain development in the name of the movement, and also the term of ink painting. It is difficult to pinpoint when the movement came to an end. According to Zhang Yu, it happened in 2009, if we consider the exhibition mentioned above.

Liu Yiyuan 劉一原 (b. 1942) is a contemporary ink painter who was active in '85 New Wave, and participated in the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash since its beginnings. [296] He presented his works at some of the big exhibitions of the movement during the 1990s, such as *Artistic Trends in Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century* in Guangzhou. In order to manifest his individual feelings, his reflections on life, and his dreams he left behind traditional aesthetics. Liu Yiyuan is naturally following the path of abstraction. In his paintings we do not see landscapes, historical monuments, cold mountains or small houses. His works have a specific atmosphere; they bear the marks of a personalised

[296] In 1979, he obtained a postgraduate degree in Chinese painting from the Hubei Academy of Fine Arts. He is currently working as a professor in the Department of Chinese Painting at the Hubei Academy of Fine Arts.

Liu Yuyuan. *Observation by Brush – Structure*, 2016, mixed materials on paper

vision.[297] Observing his work over more than ten years, we can see clearly the continuity of his artistic style. For years he has applied the same rounded lines, typical of his early works, now sometimes interrupted by traces of direct lines, resembling a raster. His composition has slowly changed from the typical Western full composition to a lighter composition, making use of emptiness (see his two paintings from 2016, bearing the same name: Observation by Brush – Structure). His compositions now range from fully filled monolithic works, typical of his experimental beginnings, to asymmetric structures. On his website exhibition space[298] purely abstract works

[297] Yin Shuangxi殷雙喜. "Guanyu Liu Yiyuan de hua 關於劉一原的畫« [About Liu Yiyuan's paintings]." *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century /Ershi shiji mo zhongguo xiandai shuimo yishu zoushi*, Modern Ink and Wash Painting Series, III, Heilongjiang meishu chubanshe, 1996, pp. 68–69.

[298] See more at "LiuYiyuan guohua zuopin- Liu Yiyuan guanfang wangzhan-Yachang Yishujia wang劉一原國畫作品_劉一原官方網站-雅昌藝術家網[Chinese artworks of Liu Yiyuan- Liu Yiyuan official website-artron artist's website]", *liuyiyuan.artron.net/works*. last retrieved July 15, 2019.

can be seen as well as his semi-abstract works on which the traces of insects (spiders) appear, but it also exhibits traditional ink paintings, landscapes and herbal compositions.

Yi Mo 一墨 (called also Yuan Mao 袁矛, b. 1959) was one of the organisers active at a certain period of the movement. He started to devote himself to experimental ink painting in the mid-1980s and was seeking freedom in his paintings. His main achievement was his work in organisations; he served as chairman of the World Association of Chinese Artists. He was involved in the movement for a few years, before turning his attention back to traditional ink painting, as is evident from his artworks shown online. Online he mostly presents landscapes, figurative paintings, and flower paintings in the traditional style.[299]

Although in the catalogues and monographs of the movement from the 1990s the majority of authors were represented by abstract works, not all of them continued to walk the path of pure abstraction. One of them is Yang Jinsong 楊勁松 (b. 1955), who creates his paintings in both ink and mixed materials on canvas. Although he does abstract art, as shown and avowed on his webpage, abstraction represents only a part of his works.[300]

The works of Zhang Jin 張進 (b. 1958) were not all abstract, but also figurative or natural, and even rejected abstract art. Works exhibited in Lille were much closer to abstraction, but without seeing the originals it is impossible to be sure whether these were pure abstractions or a kind of semi-abstract work. According to Jin's presentation online, the works shown are mostly non-abstract Chinese paintings and his published opinions indicate[301] his critical attitude towards abstraction.[302] Perhaps because

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[299] See "Chengshi hualang" Yi Mo (Yuan Mao) – Chengshi hualang hualang zhuye "城市畫廊." 一墨（袁矛）_城市畫廊_畫廊主頁 ["City Gallery" Yi Mo (Yuan Mao) – City Gallery homepage]"_*Yachang yishu wang*, gallery.artron.net/2815/g_artist_show_15573.html, last retrieved July 17, 2019.

[300] He graduated from Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (nowadays Chinese Academy of Fine Arts) in Hangzhou, where he has taught since 2000. Yang spent a few years (1992 – 1997) in Europe. See "Yang Jinsong", *Artlinksart*. http://www.artlinkart.com/cn/artist/overview/fdadwwpn, last retrieved 25 January 2020.

[301] *Yishujia Zhang Jin geren guan wang*艺术家张进个人官网*[Artist's Zhang Jin official webpage]*, artist.rbz1672.com/phone/artist/305. last retrieved 20 January 2020.

[302] "張進批評某些畫家在吸收西方現代藝術的過程中，生搬硬套，是『奶油』加『咖啡』式的水墨畫，說這些畫家（其中包括某些批評家）『正在不自覺地進入到不覺醒或困惑狀的局面，陷入以抽象水墨為標榜的新的被侵略境地中』[Zhang Jin criticised some painters who, bewitched by Western art apply Western ele-

of such attitudes, the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash sometimes deviates from abstraction towards shape and content, and for many artists it is difficult to stick to abstraction.

Apart from artists who were members of the movement from the beginnings, there are some who joined it later, or participated in just a few exhibitions, artists such as Liang Quan, Pan Ying, Liu Xuguang, Chen Honghan (b. 1969). They all participated in the exhibition *Encres De Chine Expérimentales*, Lille, 2005 and some later exhibitions.

A woman painter, Pan Ying 潘纓 (b. 1962) of Mongolian origin, is distantly connected to the movement.[303] The majority of her works presented online consist of more traditional art genres, such as highly-coloured figurative paintings. She participated in some exhibitions of the movement, such as the huge *Exhibition of Chi-*

Pan Ying. *Phantasy 54*, 1997, ink and mixed materials on paper

ments, paint ink paintings like 'cream' and 'coffee'. He says that these artists (and even some art critics) "fell into the trap of admiring this new invasion presented by abstract ink painting"], in "Zhang Jin de shuimo yinji 張進的水墨印跡 [Zhang Jin's Traces of Ink and wash]", *Xinhua net*, http://news.xinhuanet.com/shuhua/2011-09/15/c_122036963_2.html. Last retrieved 9 June 2019.

[303] She graduated from the Fine Arts Department of the Art Institute of the People's Liberation Army in 1983. In 2006, she completed her PhD studies from the Fine Arts College of the Central University for Nationalities. From 1987 to 2008, she taught at the Academy of Fine Arts of the Central University for Nationalities. She currently teaches at the Chinese Academy of Fine Arts. Simultaneously she is an artist at the Creative academy and a member of many art organizations, such as the Chinese Artists Association and the Women Artists Association, where she is president. See more in "Pan Ying 潘纓." *Dao baike shouye*到百科首页, baike.baidu.com/item/潘纓. Last retrieved 25 January 2020.

nese Experimental Ink and Wash in 2002-2003, and she exhibited her abstract paintings in Lille, 2005 in an exhibition organised by Zhang Yu. The style of her semi-abstract artwork presented here is quite different from those from Lille, published in the catalogue. In her so-called "woven series", there are precisely elaborated ribbons, which intertwine like snakes. It is a dramatic change from the generous sketches of calligraphic paintings exhibited in Lille. The semi-abstract paintings shown here are closer to her more traditional works.

As mentioned several times, not all artists continued with abstract paintings. For some of them it was just an opportunity to try something new, and after a few exhibitions they returned to their original domains, to calligraphy or more traditional styles of ink painting, the calligrapher Wei Baorong (b. 1946) for example, whose abstract ink paintings display strong calligraphic features.

The problem of artists involved in abstract painting, especially in abstract ink, is that some of them are often unable to pursue the abstract form for a longer period of time for commercial reasons. Some do ink painting in several completely different styles, potentially to gain some profit selling the sort of artwork the public prefers, such as traditional ink painting. Others artists stopped doing abstract art, because they were unable to continue with the non-representational form. It is easier to capture the shapes of figures, or to find a dynamic in the bold lines of calligraphy rather than when resorting to a non-representational content.

In August 2009 Zhang Yu organised an exhibition called *The Termination of Chinese Ink Painting! Creating Personal Contemporary Art!*,[304] at which point he proclaimed the end of the movement. According to him, the movement has met its goals. Some artists continued to follow the trends and tried to enforce the work that was seen as experimental at the time of the beginning of the movement, others returned to their roots in traditional Chinese ink painting.

[304] The exhibition Zhongjie "shuimo hua"! Chuanzao ziji de dangdai yishu! 終結 "水墨畫"！創造自己的當代藝術 opened in 26 September 2009 in the Red Gate Gallery, Beijing. See more in Zhongjie "shuimo hua"! Chuanzao ziji de dangdai yishu! 終結 "水墨畫"！創造自己的當代藝術[The Termination of Chinese Ink Painting! Creating Personal Contemporary Art!]" *Artlinkart*, http://www.artlinkart.com/cn/exhibition/overview/f9aawCoj. Last retrieved 25 January 2020.

We should not forget that the movement was not the only platform that brought together artists creating abstract ink paintings. It can be said that it was the first and foremost artistic trend of its kind in contemporary mainland China. In addition to the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash, there were a number of exhibitions organised by Gao Minglu with a global reach, in which he presented abstract painting in its full range, not only ink painting but also oil painting. Although the founder of the Zhang Yu movement officially ended the Movement in 2009, he continues to organise one or two exhibitions a year, presenting avant-garde artists, mainly those who are in some way connected with ink. Another art movement has recently been formed by the art critic Xia Kejun, whose artistic achievements it is still too premature to evaluate but who will be briefly mentioned later, as well as some artists involved in the movement. Naturally, many artists are active in several movements; Zhang Yu himself has been presenting at exhibitions organised by Gao Minglu. Last but not least, there are some artists who, for various reasons, mainly due to living a significant part of their artistic life abroad, do not participate in any of the movements mentioned here, or only to a limited extent. According to Yi Ying:

> The experiment consisted of the process of creation, which means that speaking of an experiment in ink painting indicates that there are limitless possibilities for the development of ink painting.[305]

[305] Yi Ying易英. "Possibilities of Experimental Wash Painting/Shiyan shuimo de keneng xing試驗水墨的可能性". *Experimental Wash Painting of China in the 90's /Jiushi niandai zhongguo shiyan shuimo*九十年代中國實驗水墨, Shijie huaren yishu chubanshe, 1998, p. 136.

V. Abstract Ink Painting in China Beyond and After the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash

After 2009, when the founder of the movement of Experimental Ink and Wash Zhang Yu officially ended the movement, exhibitions in its name continued to sprout. After 2010, Zhang Yu organised exhibitions such as *Back to the Essence – From Ink Painting to Ink* (2011),[306] *Beyond method* (2013, Taichun, Taiwan)[307], and others. A famous art theorist Gao Minglu launched some himself with a global reach, and other curators and theorists are interested in contemporary ink painting. Art critic Xia Kejun has recently formed another art movement. Naturally, many artists are active in several movements, and Zhang Yu himself has been presented at exhibitions organised by other art curators. Some artists doing abstract ink painting did not participate in any of the movements mentioned here, or only to a limited extent, for various reasons. Nevertheless, they are still a part of the picture of abstract ink art in mainland China.

At the beginning of the 21st century, when the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash was active and reached its zenith, other movements of art groups involved in contemporary ink painting started to appear and critics started to promote ink painting with strong abstract features. In that period, many exhibitions featuring ink art were held not just in China but around the world.

As mentioned here, not all Chinese artists residing in mainland China and involved in contemporary ink were associated with the Movement. The reasons are various, from timing to personal relationships with major actors of the movement. Apart from the movements, there are other groups

[306] "Back to the Essence – From Ink Painting to Ink", *Da Xiang Art Space*, Taiwan https://daxiang.com.tw/back-to-the-essence-from-ink-painting-to-ink/?lang=en. Last retrieved 21 January 2020.

[307] "Fangfa zhiwai, Dangdai yishu zhan"方法之外"當代藝術展[Beyond method, Contemporary art exhibition]." *Artron*, https://exhibit.artron.net/exhibition-22304.html. Last retrieved 21 January 2020.

The presentation of contemporary Chinese calligraphy, Honk Kong Ink Art Fair, Chinese pavilion participating artists: Gu Wenda, Wang Dongling, Zhang Hao, Jin Feng, Chen Guangwu. Exhibition time: December 15, 2016

involved in contemporary ink painting and artists who do not belong to any of the groups. Except for the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash, there are other critics promoting painting with strong abstract features.

V. 1. Maximalism, Yi Pai, and some international exhibitions featuring abstract ink art

One of the most representative is the famous art critic Gao Minglu who organised several influential exhibitions featuring abstract painting in China and abroad. He pointed out two essential terms somehow connected with abstract painting; Maximalism and Yi Pai (the Imaginary). His exhibitions such as *Chinese Maximalism* at the China Millennium Monument in Beijing, the UB Anderson Gallery at University at Buffalo in New York (2003) and *Prayer Beads and Brush Strokes* at Beijing

Tokyo Art Projects, Beijing (2003) presented Chinese abstract artists on a worldwide level.

In July 2007 Gao Minglu organised the exhibition *Ink and Wash Narrative*[308] in the Contemporary Art Gallery in Yokohama, Japan in cooperation with Zhang Yu. The catalogue from the exhibition was published the same year in Hong Kong.[309]

Another major project of Gao Minglu's was an immense series of exhibitions *The Imaginary (Yi Pai): 30 Years of Chinese 'Abstraction'*, which opened on 16 December 2007 in The Wall Gallery, Beijing, continued in Spain and then back to Beijing.[310] Several artists doing ink paintings were selected for this exhibition which attracted much attention among Chinese artists and art theorists. The number of artists who participated in the exhibitions grew from about fifty to eighty. Some sources mention the different name of the exhibition in 2009; according to Zhang Yu, the name of the last one was *Yi Pai: Thought of the Century*.[311]

Typical of Gao Minglu's exhibitions and article promoting Maximalism and Yi Pai was that he featured prominent artists no matter what techniques or medium they used. Apart from the artists mentioned here, he presented outstanding Chinese artists doing abstract oil painting or

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308 "Shuimo xushi" danddai yishu zhan "水墨敘事" 當代藝術展[Ink and Wash Narative, an exhibition of contemporary art]." *Artron*, https://exhibit.artron.net/exhibition-3499.html last retrieved 28 January 2020.

309 Zhang Yu. *Shuimo xushi*水墨叙事*[Ink and Wash Narative]*. Yazhou wenhua xiehui, 2007.

310 The exhibiton The Imaginary (Yi Pai): 30 Years of Chinese 'Abstraction' also opened in 14 March 2008 at the Parma Art Gallery, Spain, in 3 Jun 2008 in the Barcelona Art Gallery, in 13 November 2008 in Madrid, Spain, 31 May 2009 in Today Art Museum, Beijing. A catalogue from the exhibition was published in 2009 in Harbin Gao Minglu 高名潞(ed). *Yi Pai: Shiji siwei* 意派：世纪思维/*Imaginary (Yi Pai): Thought of the Century*. Harbin Gongcheng daxue chubanshe, 2009.

311 Zhang Yu, 張羽. Wo wei shenme tuidong "Shiyan Shuimo" – Zi shi zhi zhong wo suo canyu de shiyan shuimo我為什麼推動 "實驗水墨" ——自始至終我所參與的實驗水墨 [Why I promote "Experimental Ink Painting" —— The Experimental Ink Painting I participated in from beginning to end] written by him in 2014, presented 19 November 2014 in Xizi Hupan, and 30 December 2014 in T3 International Art zone. Zhang Yu張羽. "Zi shi zhi zhong wo suo canyu de `shiyan shuimo'—zhe chang cheng bu shang yundong de yundong 自始至終我所參與的「實驗水墨」—這場稱不上運動的運動 [The "Ink Wash" I participated in from beginning to end – this is not a movement]", 28 November 2017, *kknews*, https://kknews.cc/culture/peg9ma8.html last retrieved 18 October 2019.

who used different materials, such as Li Xiangming, Meng Luding, and Tan Ping. Although he always stressed that abstraction came from the West as a reaction to realism, and he always spoke about 'abstraction', he featured several abstract artists. In the preface of the English version of catalogue Gao claims that

> 'Yi Pai' attempts to rediscover the perception of wisdom and association of poetry in contemporary art and shorten the discrepancy between concepts and graphics, abstractness and reality, political discourse and aesthetic perception, and eliminate the "pre-modern, modern, postmodern, and contemporary" historical narration on the lineal basis of time.[312]

Except for the above-mentioned, many other exhibitions were held presenting abstract ink painting or Chinese abstract painting including ink painting or featuring Chinese artists together with the artists from different countries. Examples of these are: The *Ink and Paper-Exhibition of Contemporary Chinese Art* at the Guangdong Museum of Art and the Kunsthalle in Weimar, Germany (2005); *Korean-Chinese Contemporary Ink Painting* at the Seoul

Liu Xuguang. *Quiescence 2*, 1995, ink and mixed materials on rice paper

[312] Gao Minglu (curator). *Perfection by Chance A Yi Pai Series Exhibition*, Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong, Shanghai Singapore (no publication date), Pearl Lam Gallery, https://www.pearllam.com/wp-content/blogs.dir/1/files_mf/1426240423PerfectionbyChanceAYiPaiSeriesExhibitionENG.pdf downloaded 28 January 2020.

Museum of Art, South Korea (2005); *Form, Idea, Essence and Rhythm* at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum (2008).[313]

An exciting project was held in Rome in 2011 curated by Achille Bonito Oliva. A huge exhibition *LA GRANDE ASTRAZIONE CELESTE,* in Rome's Museum of Contemporary Art presented distinguished Chinese abstract artists.[314] This exhibition was first presented in the Chinese Art museum in Beijing in April 2010.

Some other exhibitions devoted to ink painting emphasised its abstract or semi-abstract features, for instance *Ink, Not Ink*, Shenzhen Art Museum/ Today Art Museum, Beijing, 2008, re-exhibited later, in 2009, in Philadelphia.[315] Shanghai slowly became a centre of abstract art in China. Therefore several smaller group exhibitions have been organised there, such as *Conceptual Ink*, in 2011,[316] or in the same year, *Ink Art, A World Without Rules* in !28 Art Space, Shanghai, *Visible Soul, The Fourth Chinese Abstract Art Exhibition*[317]. Hong Kong retains its prominence as a place with a special feeling for ink art and abstract and semi-abstract painting. In addition to large-scale exhibitions, there are some small galleries in Switzerland, too, featuring Chinese artists using ink, such as the Tag Gallery

313 Li Huasheng李華生. *Ink Studio*, www.inkstudio.com.cn/zh/artists/70-li-huasheng/overview/. Last retrieved 28 January 2020.

314 The exhibition lasted from 16 November, 2011 till 15 January, 2012, and presented 32 works by 15 artists: Lei Hong (b. 1972), Li Huasheng (1944-2018), Li Xiangyang (1957), Lian Quan (1948), Liu Gang (1965), Liu Xuguang (1958), Ma Kelu (1954), Meng Luding (1962), Tan Ping (1960), Xu Hongming (1971), Yu Youhan (1943), Zhang Hao (1962), Zhang Jianjun (1955), Zhang Yu (1959), Zhou Yangming (1971). For more information see: "La Grande Astrazione Celeste. Arte Cinese Del XXI Secolo: MACRO Museum." *MACRO Rome: Museum of Contemporary Art*, www.museomacro.it/mostra/la-grande-astrazione-celeste-arte-cinese-del-xxi-secolo. Last retrieved 4 February 2020.

315 INK not INK an Exhibition of Contemporary Chinese Art Makes Only US Stop at Drexel. 30 January 2009.

316 Conceptual ink, Feizi Art Club, Shanghai, 28 October 2011 – 27 November 2011, http://www.artlinkart.com/en/exhibition/overview/e0dbzCqq/type/group/2011/10,lLast retrieved 25 January 2020.

317 Visible Soul, The Fourth Chinese Abstract Art Exhibition, Fifo Gallery, Shanghai, 4 – 30 June 2011, Artists: Chen Qiang, Chen Ruobing, Cao Xiaodong, Hu Qinwu, Hu Pingsheng, Huang Jia, Jiang Dahai, Li Gang, Li Lei, Liu Jian, Liu Wentao, Ma Shuqing, Meng Luding, Shang Pingjun, Tan Ping, Wang Chuan, Wang Huaiqing, Yan Shanchun, Zhang Xuerui, Zhang Yu, Zhou Changjiang. https://pifo.cn/exhibitions/47/overview/, last retrieved 28 January 2020.

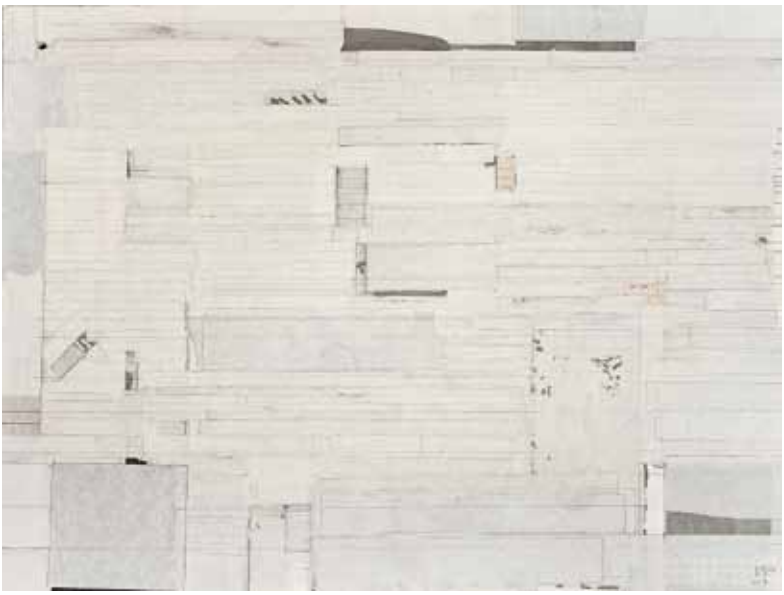
Liu Xuguang. *Eyes of Heaven (Installation and performance)*, 1997, Ink, Rice-Paper, Mineral-Colour, Rust, Bone-Glue, Albumin, Canvas, Shoushan stone, plaster, ancient figures, feng shui calculations, photography (Yokohama Museum of Art)

in Lugano, where an exhibition of Chinese ink art with markedly abstract features presented Zhang Yu's ink works, in 2017.[318] Ink and artists using ink in contemporary ways were presented at the exhibition *Ink: The Art of China* in the Saatchi Gallery, in 2012.[319]

Another exhibition, "*Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China"*, held in 2013 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the first major exhibition of Chinese contemporary art ever mounted by the Metropolitan, explores how contemporary works from a non-Western culture may be displayed in an encyclopaedic art museum. Presented in the Museum's permanent galleries of Chinese art, the exhibition featured artworks

[318] "Zhang Yu con altri sette maestri cinesi espone alla TAG," 17 September 2017, http://www.ticinolive.ch/2017/09/14/zhang-yu-altri-sette-maestri-cinesi-espone-alla-tag/, last retrieved 25 January 2020.

[319] *Ink*: *The Art of China* in Saatchi Gallery, London, 19 June – 5 July 2012, featured 50 artists, see more in Mason, S. Brook. "Michael Goedhuis DEBUTING CHINESE INK PAINTING AT THE SAATCHI GALLERY" http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/mason/michael-goedhuis-chinese-ink-painting-6-20-12.asp, last retrieved 28 January 2020.

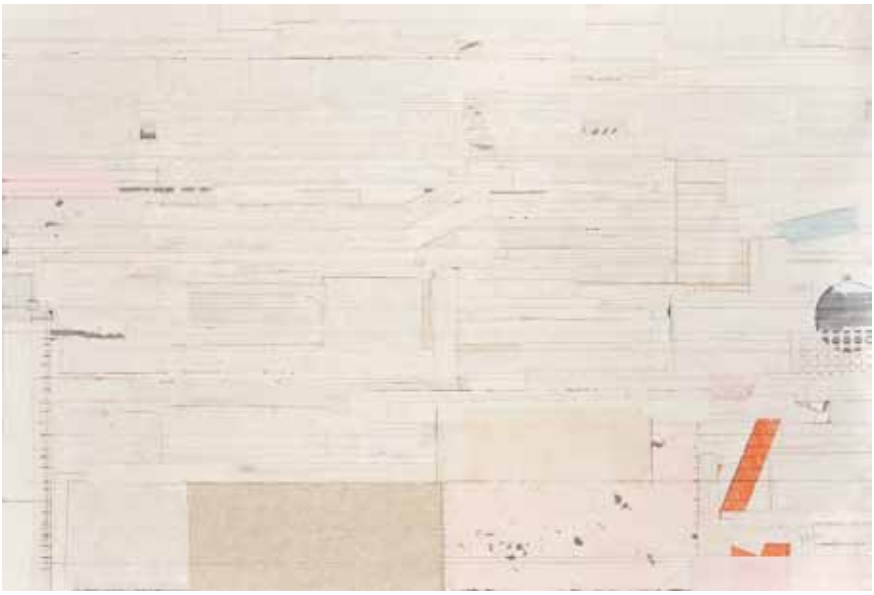


Liang Quan. *Hommage to Ni Yunlin*, 2013, ink, rice paper collage

that may be best understood as part of the continuum of China's traditional culture. These works may also be appreciated for their perspective on global art, but by examining them through the lens of Chinese historical and artistic paradigms, layers of meaning and cultural significance that might otherwise go unnoticed are revealed.[320] Some of the artists who participated in these exhibitions were already known; such as Zhang Yu, Li Huasheng, or Zhang Hao, some of them, e. g. Meng Luding, Li Xiangming, Zhang Jianjun, Lu Hong, Yu Youhan, Tan Ping, Zhou Xianming, and Ma Kelu are working mostly with oil painting or other materials different from ink.

When speaking about abstract ink painting, we should mention the talented artist Liang Quan 梁銓 (b. 1948), who is also one of the artists selected for the exhibition in Rome curated by Oliva. He, like other artists, participated in several movements. He joined the Movement of Experi-

[320] "Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China," 11 December 2013 – 6 April 2014, *Metmuseum*, https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2013/ink-art, last retrieved 28 January 2020. See further in Hearn, Maxwell K. *Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China*. Yale University Press, 2013.



Liang Quan. *The Day of Drinking Tea*, 2011, flour, tea, colour, and ink rice paper collage on canvas

mental Ink and Wash relatively late, but his works show markedly abstract features. He mostly focuses on ink painting and printing.[321] Although he did not participate in the first exhibitions of Experimental Ink Painting and Wash in the 1990s, his ink works without any doubt occupy the position of the experimental in Chinese art. He has taken part in many exhibitions in which the word abstraction appears, [322] and has participated in several

[321] In 1964, Liang Chuan joined the High School attached to the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts. In 1980, he went to the San Francisco Art Institute to study for a master's degree. After returning to China, he worked as an associate professor at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (nowadays Chinese Academy of Fine Arts). Since 1995 he has lived in Shenzhen and Hangzhou. He is a full-time painter at the Shenzhen Painting Academy and a member of the Chinese Artists Association (information provided by the artist, September 2019).

[322] Some of Liang Quan's exhibitions are *Yi Pai: 30 Years of Abstract Art in China* Palma/ Barcelona/ Madrid, 2010, *Visible Soul--The 4th Chinese Abstract Art Exhibition (*"象由心生"中國抽象藝術第四回展*),* PIFO New Art Gallery，Beijing, 2011*, Way of Dao, Nature – Exhibition of Chinese Contemporary Abstract Art (*道法自然——當代中國抽象藝術展*)*，*Shanghai Exhibition Hall of Contemporary Art, Shanghai, 2011, LA GRANDE ASTRAZIONE CELESTE,* Rome Museum of Contemporary Art, Rome 2011*,*

exhibitions connected with the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash. He has been included in several publications on the Movement since 2000.

Liang Quan is an artist who in his own admission draws inspiration from Daoist philosophy and classical Chinese literature, especially the philosophical concept of the emptiness, which comes from Chan Buddhist philosophy. According to him, ink is mostly the medium, but in the interactions between Western and Eastern art, it carries more cultural connotations. As to the source of his inspiration, he also claimed:

> I have been trying to show my inner order for more than ten years. I found the answer on the washing board used by my grandma.[323]

Liang intentionally avoids traces of brush in his paintings. Sometimes he uses experimental materials, like tea bags, which he put onto the *xuan* paper for creating light dots similar to pale ink, but in a light brown colour. His artwork is unusual in its emphasis on the philosophical, its reflexive nature, and almost transcendental placidity.

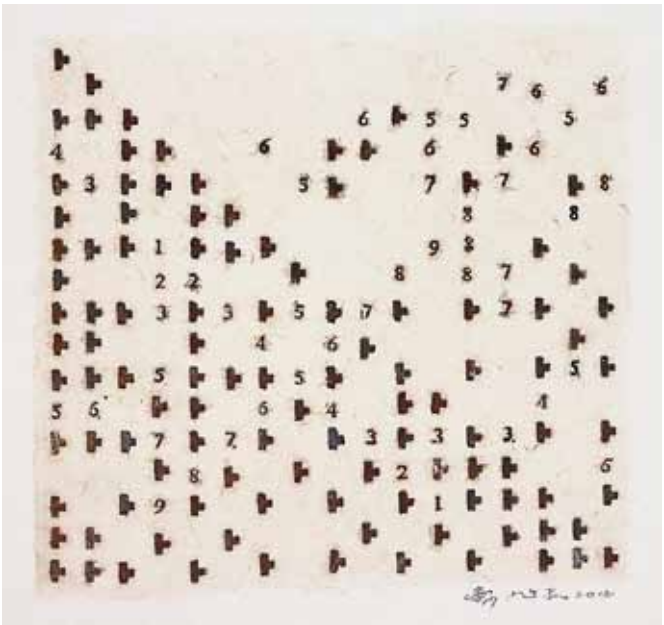
Another distinguished artist worthy of mention is Liu Xuguang 劉旭光 (b. 1962). He graduated from the Chinese Department of Suzhou Railway Teachers College. He is a member of the Sichuan Artists Association, a member of the Sichuan Calligraphers Association, a member of the Chinese Writers Association, and a full-time artist.

In his early years, Liu Xuguang stayed in Japan and came in contact with the school of object art, studying oriental thought, creating the art theory of the sense of material reality by the inspiration from mathematical and yin-yang dimensions in the Book of Changes, and then by exploring the possibility of language and vision of formal sophistication and medium in the contemporary art system. He has undertaken a deep and lasting exploration ranging from the visual, physical media to the expressive resources of digital media.[324]

Chinese Abstract Art Exhibition (中國抽象展), Minnesota University Art Museum, Minnesota, 2011, 平心——中國抽象藝術第五回展,In 2013 he held an exhibition with Zhang Yu in Beijing. Except that, he participated to some exhibitions connected to the movement of Experimental Ink and Wash, as are Ink ≠ Ink Painting: Art Exhibition of Zhang Yu, Li Huasheng, Liang Quan in August 2008 in Hejingyuan gallery, *At Rest – The Fifth Exhibition of Chinese Abstract Art*, Pifo Gallery, Beijing, 2012.

323 Email correspondence with the artist, 26 March 2014.

324 Based on Liu Xuguang's Theory of Essence, he painted the series „Heaven and Earth" in



Liu Xuguang. *Prime Field-1408*, 2014, ink, mineral pigment, rust, bone glue, albumen on rice paper

He has participated in thematic biennales and group exhibitions both at home and abroad, and also held solo exhibitions based on the concept of the sense of material reality in China, Japan, the United States, Finland, Comoros and other countries.

Liu Xuguang participated in the exhibition *Ink Narrative* in 2007, in which he expressed his views of art: "Culture is questioned by the "qual-

1991, created the painting installation works „Heaven's eye" and „Suspension" in 1997 and 2001 respectively, and painted a series of paintings titled „Marks" from 2004 to 2013. As for the works in digital form, he made the video „Ink" in 2004, the interactive digital work „I" in 2010, the photograph „The River of Ink" in 2011, and the medium film „mò Image" in 2013, "Prime Field" series of paintings in 2014, " Insight Essence" series of paintings in 2016, "Derivative field-circular pile "Installation art in 2018, "Prime Field—Magnetic Field" "Prime Field ——The anger of Emperor Yan" "The night that Lao Yang´er was observing the disappearing sun" Installation art in 2019. "2013 yishu buluo wang nian duo renwu tuijian – Liu Xuguang 2013藝術部落網年度人物推薦-劉旭光" 藝術部落http://xdsf.com/Bbs/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=25641, last retrieved 27 January 2020.

ity" of art as the creative concept. However, after the problem has been raised, we have not ended the discussion on issues such as "materialism" and "monochrome painting"".[325] As Liu Xuguang claimed:

> If we approach the problem of ink painting from the material of the ink, it is more fundamentally about the issue of black and white. Further thinking about the question is similar to yin and yang in the "Book of Changes". In the past, the first traces of black and white and yin and yang in our ink and wash were dated back even further to the Bronze Age (styling, materials, writing, and technology) and the Oracle bones period before the Han dynasty. Thinking about it, the gossip figure becomes the earliest abstract symbol. It is the white image and the representative of the yin and yang concept. You can see how fascinating the path to "black and white" and "ink" is. The story is not over yet. It has been talked about 7,000 years ago to the present, and it seems as if we have returned to the prehistoric period today. It is not the same as if Fuxi's yin and yang gossip (black and white abstract picture) and Leibniz met. How meaningful "black and white", "yin and yang", "opening and closing" and "01" bring us back to today and the digital age. We have a discussion of contemporary art through ink and black and white so that black and white ink painting has become the core of my creation. I call it "quality" in the essence of black and white, yin and yang.[326]

The works of Liu Xuguang cross over into other genres such as film, photography and digital technology. This feature distinguishes his works from those of most artists whose works are mentioned here. His broad range asks questions, redefining the boundaries of what is called the art of ink. Is a photo of an ink drop on rice paper still ink art? How does technology define art? In his Marks series of works of art, from 2004 to 2018, he moved from recording to digitization, to *Yijing* calculations, re-recording this data on paper using, in addition to ink, mineral colours as well as rust and other mixed materials. Typical of his painting is the use of the symbol

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325 Zhang Yu張羽. "Zi shi zhi zhong wo suo canyu de `shiyan shuimo'—zhe chang cheng bu shang yundong de yundong自始至終我所參與的「實驗水墨」—這場稱不上運動的運動[The "Ink Wash" I participated in from beginning to end – this is not a movement]" 28 November 2017, *Kknews,* https://kknews.cc/culture/peg9ma8.html, last retrieved 18 October 2019.

326 From email correspondence, September 2019.

T, which has repeatedly appeared in his works for many years, like a secret code, which is multiplied, abstracted, and used in the calculations to be subsequently recorded on paper.

Unfortunately, Maximalism and Yi Pai did not continue for long, perhaps because of the many differences between artists coming from different artistic backgrounds who are using various techniques, or the hostile attitude of other critics towards abstraction and all paintings that they called "abstraction". It is possible to guess at other reasons, but there is no evidence of why it ended. Nevertheless, most artists who participated in the movements continued with abstract art. The main achievements of the movements are to promote contemporary Chinese art abroad, and to try to attract attention to Chinese abstract art. What is interesting is that after these movements, exhibitions including oil painting and ink painting still took place occasionally, for example the exhibition *Abstract Art* in 2011.[327] However, no art critic tried to promote artists doing oil painting and those doing ink art in a single movement again.

Liu Xuguang. *Marks 2006-S-1*, 2006, ink, mineral colour, rust, bone glue, albumen on rice paper

[327] *Abstract Art*, an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Beijing, started on 11. 11. 2011, at 11:11. The curator Wu Zhenhuan, exhibited the works of 23 artists. For more information see: http://www.artlinkart.com/cn/artist/exh_yr/55fbyAlq, last retrieved 28 January 2020.

V. 2. Abstract ink paintings with marked calligraphic features, "weird and independent" artists

The movement of Experimental Ink and Wash, Maximalism and Yi Pai were not the only movements launched in mainland China which included artworks with an abstract or semi-abstract dimension. Apart from Experimental Ink and Wash, there is another movement in painting called False (or forged) calligraphy (*wei shufa* 偽書法). Sometimes it is called Abstract calligraphy. Pseudo calligraphy is a kind of abstract painting deriving from calligraphy and claiming calligraphy as a vital source of inspiration. At the end of the process, no more Chinese characters are visible. It has become an abstract painting with distinct calligraphic features. Unlike other movements, such as Experimental Ink and Wash or Yi Pai, Abstract calligraphy is not restricted to mainland China or the Chinese cultural world, but includes Japan, where it started. Therefore, Japanese avant-garde calligraphy was mentioned as one of the sources of inspiration for Chinese artists.

We can find some calligraphic styles in the Chinese history of calligraphy which had reached the limits of understanding. One of them is

Wang Dongling. *Poems of Ji Kang and Ruan Ji*, 2017, ink on rice paper

"crazy script" *kuangcao*, a way of writing *caoshu* whose strokes were connected, and where the formal beauty of the lines far exceeded the content. The text became only an excuse for writing unrestrained lines and to emphasise the personality of the author. Exponents of False calligraphy realised that the specific kind of calligraphy could exist only because of its form and there was no more need to have a specific text as validation for the existence of the lines. The connections between these two styles of painting are unclear, but it seems that experimental ink painting was able to establish a strong and all-embracing movement which attracted more attention and whose name is still used in the title of exhibitions in the present day. Naturally, there are painters not involved in any of those movements. On the other hand, some artists participated in the activities of both movements. It seems that the reasons for participating or not participating in some exhibitions can be more personal than based purely on artistic affiliation.

This kind of abstract painting with a vigorous calligraphy-looking appearance is deeply rooted in the Chinese tradition of calligraphy. For example, the works of Song Gang, an artist who joined '85 New Wave and whose works were showcased at the exhibition *China Avant-garde 89* in the Art Museum of China, are very close to the Chinese understanding of abstraction. After the exhibition, he disappeared from the Chinese art scene, and his trace was lost. Chinese sources are not very consistent in labelling artistic styles, sometimes they label an artist as an abstract painter; sometimes, the artists represent forged calligraphy alongside their regular calligraphic works. In realising that, we notice Pseudo calligraphy is not always presumed to be a style of abstract painting. Sometimes it is called Abstract calligraphy and can be considered a new style of calligraphy, as the art of writing not as a style of painting. Indubitably, the difference between Abstract calligraphy and abstract painting is exceptionally uncertain.

If there is no recognisable text, can we still speak about calligraphy? Where is the border between 'abstract calligraphy' and abstraction? This vagueness exists mainly in the eyes of Westerners, who tend to get lost in context more quickly, but is also somewhat unclear for the Chinese. As is evident from what has been said above, the opinions of Gao Minglu, Gu Wenda, and Zhang Yu are different, or rather they are contradictory. Sometimes artists or art theorists deny what they claimed a few years before. This shows that artists and their inner world can hardly be restricted by any rules, even by rules created by themselves.

Lao He. *I saw a Painting of a Flying Kite by Qi Baishi, haha, that Line is Longer! Is the first part long?*, 2019, ink and other media on hard paper
Lao He. *The Decay and Excitement of the Speed of Light*, 2019, ink and other media on hard paper

It would be better to call most of the artists mentioned here as unconventional, unruly, wild and unrestrained, or use the word which is quite popular in Chinese art history – weird (*guai*怪). This trait is not specific only to Chinese artists. Some artists mentioned here participated in exhibitions organised by art theorists and curators mentioned in the previous chapters. Therefore, the criterion of strangeness and independence is just another of many easily detachable labels.

One of the weirdest of the artists mentioned here is undoubtedly Lao He老赫 (1957, Wuhan). His original name, probably still used on his ID, is Wu Guoquan吳國全; another of his artist's names, Hei Gui黑鬼, means Black Ghost, or Black Devil. In 1983, he graduated from Hubei Academy of Fine Arts. Hei Gui started to exhibit his experimental artworks during '85 New Wave when he exhibited a large ink painting in the Hubei Youth Art Festival in 1986. His installation *Story of Black Devil*[328] appeared one year later (1987) at Hubei Youth Art Festival Centre in the Exhibition Hall. During his turbulent life, apart from ink paintings, he has created installations, performance art, has produced oil paintings, published several books, and participated in many art festivals and conferences.[329]

[328] Hei Gui zhuan黑鬼傳.

[329] Lao He has had about 70 collective and solo exhibitions. In 1992 he exhibited his installations and performance art called Rivers of Blood血沟. During the years 1993-2000,

As he claimed at the exhibition *Ink as a Philosophy*, whenever he changed his artistic style radically, he accompanied that with a change of name, which is why we use his most recent name. [330] Under the influence of the '85 New Wave, Wu Guoquan mainly tried to combine Western expressionist ideas with traditional ink painting techniques, which gave his works not only the characteristics of the rough and the wild, but also the art characteristics that were popular at the time. The creation of ink painting has opened up a great opportunity.[331] Lao He calls his recent works abstract paintings or 'abstract calligraphy', and he claims many and varied sources of inspiration.[332]

Over the forty years of his artistic career, whatever the form of the art it was, Hei Gui would always meld his sensibility and his life experiences into a brand new creative language, but once this language became mature, he would escape from it as soon as possible, and turn to the next challenge.

> From installation to performance, from oil paintings to ink and wash painting, Hei Gui always walked in and out of the real world and the illusive world. In between the physical and mental realm, he freely expressed the power that was released from within himself, completed his work like it was forged by fire and it was bearing the patina of the jade.[333]

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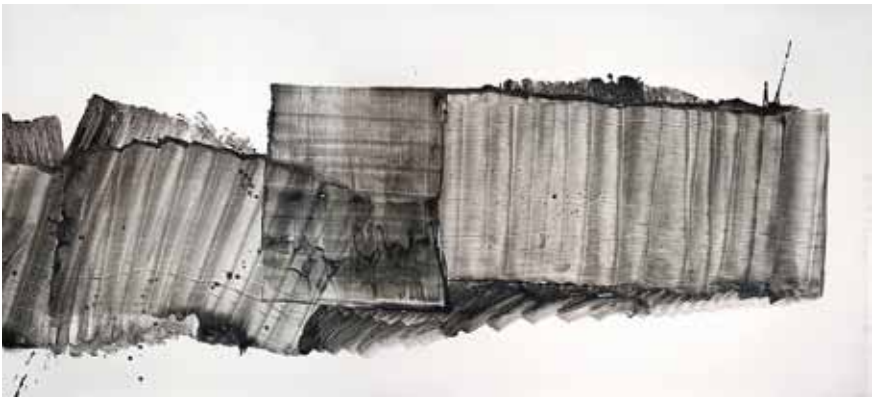
he participated in many exhibitions in China and abroad, in Belgium, USA, Japan, France, and others. He took part in several iconic exhibitions, as abovementioned 'Yi Pai'. In 2008, he participated in an exhibition of large-scale abstract paintings including twenty artists, Handwriting – Traces字跡•痕跡, in Huangcheng gallery, Beijing. In 2014, he was invited to the exhibition Great Image is without Shape大象無形, an exhibition of Contemporary Chinese Abstract Art, Today Art Museum, in 2015 he participated in the China – Australia International Art Biennale, Melbourne, Australia. In 2018, The Scale of Freedom-The Fifth Chinese Contemporary Ink Painting entered to Europe自由的尺度——第五回中國當代水墨走向歐洲, Casares, Italy, and many other exhibitions. Email correspondence with Lao He, September 2019.

330 Opening ceremony took place on 7 September 2019, *Idea Art Gallery*, Shanghai. The author and the artist participated in the symposium on the same day and had a long discussion after the symposium.

331 Lu Hong魯虹, *Jiedu Wu Guoquan de shuimo zhi lu*解讀吳國全的水墨之路*[Interpretation of Wu Guoquan's Ink and Wash Way]*, opening ceremony speech of Hei Gui exhibition, 6 August 2017,He Art Gallery, Wuhan.

332 An interview with Lao He at the opening ceremony of the exhibition *Ink as a Philosophy* , 7. 9. 2019, Idea Art Gallery, Shanghai.

333 Jia Tingfeng賈廷峰. Zhi Hei Shou Hei – Qianxi Hei Gui shuimo知黑守黑---淺析黑鬼水墨/ Understand and guard the black--- Briefly defining Hei Gui's water-ink, September 2nd 2017 in Huan Tie art district (information provided by the artist, September 2019).



Lao He. *The Hidden Chapter*, 2019, ink and other media on hard paper

Gao Minglu believes that his works are both complex and prescriptive – the elements of the picture are full of changes in structure, and complex in the simple, which is a "complex narrative". In the face of contemporary life and the global context, Hei Gui calms down and finds his uniqueness and artistic language. The essence of his artistic creation can be called "urban meditation".[334] Here is a fragment of his thoughts on art ,called *Gossip of Lao He* chosen by Zhou Yuhua:

> Zhang Xu's broken *Thousand Words scroll*, and his *Four Ancient Poems scroll* greatly inspired me and ignited my creative drive, (running with unstoppable speed, wild, uninhibited, shouting, dancing, storm and wind, freakish wave, free from stubborn rules, a ferocious scream) I can't find the word that I want, right!... I just need this overwhelming explosion, the orchestra. Beethoven, Mahler have given me inspiration, and I have sacrificed my youth for this enlightenment. Xu Wei, German Expressionism, and Abstract expressionism gave me enlightenment. They were all selected from hundreds of figures I captured outside the image. I picked the figures of meanings, poems, thoughts, music, feelings, and philosophy, and at the same time playing with space, exploring the rhythm, experiencing the tone and the variation. I'm thinking about

[334] Shui + mo| Wu Guoquan (Hei Gui, Lao He): Zhi Hei Shou Hei 水+墨 | 吳國全（黑鬼、老赫）：知黑守黑[Water + Ink Wu Guoquan (Hei Gui, Lao He: Understand and guard the black] Kuart 2018-01-19 18:54 http://www.sohu.com/a/217723789_455444, last retrieved 5 October 2019.

> how to put calligraphy into paintings, while considering the impact and tension of dots and lines and how to convert photography into paintings, add water to oil, add salt to oil, wondering about the philosophy of Heidegger, figuring out the various uses of water, paper, and ink, working out the strength, speed, burst, and power, and the length of our brush tip. Zhang Xu lives in my heart, with Laozi, Zhuangzi, and all the other great pioneers of the Renaissance and Enlightenment … to see and think, I'm outside of my image…and my dream is to become————a water-ink poet in the painting, and a visual musician.[335]

Lao He has used various media during his career; apart from ink paintings he has done oil painting, and used oil colours in creative, experimental ways, mixing different materials and techniques. Compared with his past ink and wash creations, it is clear that these various series of works have deviated from his expressionist lines and are moving towards abstract performance. Recent works of Lao He look as if they were made by massive brushstrokes, but with a different technique. It was probably a flat and wide tool unable to absorb the colours, and the artist applied an ink-like colour to the paper, creating traces very different from a typical Chinese brush. Therefore, his latest works cannot be called ink paintings in the strict sense of the term. In these monumental paintings, ink is mostly replaced by another medium such as acrylic. The medium is different, but the feeling of ink is still intense. The paintings are waving a few meters; sometimes the author exhibits them on the floor, evoking crazy *kuangcao* in its most extreme form, as found in the works of Japanese modernists. Despite the experimental techniques, they remind us of something meditative. The final effect creates something in between artworks of Abstract expressionism and centuries-old calligraphic masterpieces. According to his own admission the artist has drawn inspiration from Zhang Xu, which is evident not in a literal sense, as a direct quotation, but by the spirit of an ancient atmosphere, powerful, wild and unrestrained. The artist has rejected all rules in the creation of his exceptional works.

The art critic and artist Wang Nanming 王南溟 (b. 1962) studied law at the Huadong College of Politics and Law (Huadong zhengfa xueyuan) in Shanghai. In 1988, he left the legal profession to become an independent

[335] Zhou Yuhua周韶華. *Kuangcao*, *jiaoxiang, jianzhu yu huihua de tonggan*狂草、交響、建築與繪畫的通感*/The synesthesia of wild scribble, symphony, and construction*, August 2017, Donghu. From the information sent by the artist, September 2019.

Wang Nanming. *Balls of Characters*, 1992, ink, rice paper

artist, art critic and curator.[336] He has also worked to set up artist residencies and exhibitions for overseas artists in China. Since the mid-1980s, he

[336] In the late 1990s, Wang Nanming took an active part in the HK Commune and the development of Artists' Studios, and organised numerous exhibitions during the movement. Between 2007 and 2009, he was the editor-in-chief of the art magazines *Art Focus* and *Art Time*, setting out new directions in art criticism and provoking lively debate in the Chinese art scene. He was also a professor in Art System and Law at the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, establishing new courses for the institute and nurturing a young generation of critics in China during his tenure there. In 2017 he became a director of the Shanghai Himalayas Museum. Wang Nanming is the author of numerous publications including *Understanding Modern Calligraphy: Artistic Transformation of Modern and Avant-Garde*, *Art Must Die: from Chinese Painting to Modern Ink Painting*, *After Concept: Art and Criticism*, *The Rise of Critical Art: Chinese Problem Situations and Theories of Liberal Society*, *Modern Art and Avant-garde: Interface of Clement Greenberg's Critical Theory*, *Art, System and Legislation: China's International Exchange*, *A Post-colonial Honor: The Chinese-ness of Art and the Chinese identity of Artists* and *Obstacles of Calligraphy: Neo-classical Calligraphy, Popular Calligraphic Style, Modern Calligraphy and other Issues*. For more information see: "June 25, 2017 - Shanghai Himalayas Museum - Wang Nanming appointed as new Director", *e-flux*, https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/141785/wang-nanming-appointed-as-new-director/, last retrieved 5 February 2020.

has focused on the modernization of traditional Chinese art. By combining deconstructionist and critical theory, he has targeted the views held by neo-conservatives in publications such as *Understanding Modern Calligraphy* and *From Chinese Painting to Modern Ink and Wash Painting*. Since the early 1990s, Wang Nanming has written numerous critical essays on art, including cultural and social criticisms. On the subject of post-modernism and 'art concepts' that are 'effective' within contemporary art practice, he has written several critical essays on '85 New Wave and its underlying ideas.[337] Wang's works are in the collections of the British Museum and the Annie Wong Art Foundation and Chinese Art Museum of China. According to Barras,

> Wang quickly came to see his discarded balls of paper as symbolic of the various contradictions surrounding calligraphy itself. In his view, as well as being an elegant traditional system of writing and the basis of an evocative form of modern art, calligraphy could be regarded as representing the darker side of Chinese society. In the balls of paper that Wang now adopted as the hallmark of his art, he felt he had found the perfect graphic symbol for his rejection of the worst aspects of Chinese culture.[338]

Wang Nanming's *Black Series* of late 1980 includes some of the most abstract modern calligraphy produced in China, exhibited in the British Museum.[339] He was also one of the avant-garde calligraphers, who started to paint calligraphic lines on three-dimensional objects, the balls of paper, which he covered with calligraphic brushstrokes in order to create contemporary artworks. He used them to create three-dimensional objects, such as chairs, sofas, and similar objects.

> In the exhibition *The Four Moulages Of Social Ecology* at 99 Art Center Fine Arts College Of Shanghai University in 2012 he exhibited the creased pa-

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337 Wang, Nanming. "The Shanghai Art Museum Should Not Become a Market Stall in China for Western Hegemonism – A Paper Delivered at the 2000 Shanghai Biennale". Wu Hong (ed.), *Contemporary Chinese Art Primary Documents*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2010, p. 454.

338 Barrass, Gordon S. *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China.* University of California Press, 2002, pp. 252-253.

339 Barras, Gordon, S. *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China.* University of California Press, 2002, p. 252.

pers covered by the lines in the scenery of dry field, which can symbolise the drought of art, drought of moral principles in Chinese society, or only drought of his soul. [340]

Wang Nanming, in his balls, destroyed calligraphy and created new artworks on its ruins. His work can be described as something that is abstract ink art in a three-dimensional form. In his objects, there is a visible difference between the definition of *ink art* and *ink painting*. His works stands on the border between calligraphy and abstraction. We may wonder whether this is also an abstract work and if there was an intention in the beginning to write something. There are some parallels with the rejection of words, as seen in the work of Xu Bing, who in his false characters deliberately avoided the real names or works of Gu Wenda. However, both his *Calligraphy balls* and *Suspended Balls of Characters* give the viewer a feeling of silent meditation, an essence of harmony, similar to the feeling of looking at the ruins of a destroyed city becoming overgrown by a profusion of wild plants and flowers.

If we are speaking about abstract ink painting with strong calligraphic feelings or Abstract calligraphy, one cannot overlook the painter Wei Li-

Wang Nanming. *Suspended Balls of Characters*, 1992, rice paper, ink, writing

[340] Wang, Nanming. "The Shanghai Art Museum Should Not Become a Market Stall in China for Western Hegemonism—A Paper Delivered at the 2000 Shanghai Biennale." Wu Hong (ed.). *Contemporary Chinese Art Primary Documents*. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2010, p. 454.

Wei Ligang. *Xingzhou*, 2018, ink and acrylic colour on rice paper

gang 魏立剛 (b. 1964). Like Wang Nanming, he came to the art scene from a different background. In 1985 he graduated from the Faculty of Mathematics of Nankai University in Tianjin. He is editor-in-chief of the journal *Contemporary Calligraphy*, one of the founders of *New Saloon of True Lines*.[341] His work is in the collection of the Tate Gallery. He is currently living in Beijing, where he has a studio.

Wei Ligang's compositions are often materially linked to the calligraphic tradition in a clear preference for ink and paper. He brings in new colours to enliven his pieces and sets expectations on edge. Wei provides

[341] Some of Wei Ligang's latest solo shows include the following: in 2015, Wei's Ink Garden — New Works by Wei Ligang, Alisan Fine Arts, Aberdeen. 2016: Wei Ligang: Songs of the Phoenix Mirror, Ink Studio, Beijing; Universal Things Examine——Wei Ligang Retrospective 1996-2016, Being 3 Gallery. Selected group shows: 2017, Changing China: Contemporary Ink Painting, Michael Goedhuis, New York. In 2018, Asian Cultural Council Fellows Annual Exhibition 2018: A Charity Exhibition of Works by ACC Alumni, Alisan Fine Arts, Central Hong Kong Art Week 2018, Alisan Fine Arts, Central, The Voice of the Brush: An Exhibition of Calligraphic Art, Part 2, Alisan Fine Arts, Central. For more information see: "Wei Ligang CV", *artsy*, https://www.artsy.net/artist/wei-ligang-wei-li-gang/cv, last retrieved 25 January 2020.

a series of forms, evocative of the traditional mode of writing. His rapid movements through texture and line provide us with an aesthetic sense of appreciation of calligraphy without the need to decipher linguistic meaning.[342]

In the three decades of his career Wei Ligang has sought a universal language of abstraction based on the linear and spatial compositions of Chinese writing, a language capable of embodying the complexity and expansiveness of contemporary human knowledge and existence. His works are one of the earliest examples of a distinctly personal language in contemporary Chinese art. Wei Ligang generalises the cursive calligraphy of the Fu Shan (1607-1684) to create the distinctive script styles of epigraphic mad cursive, "gold-ink cursive," and "shadow cursive." Wei Ligang is also the creator of a celebrated body of calligraphy-informed abstract paintings.[343] In some of his paintings, he combines calligraphic brushstrokes with figurative motifs, but he admits that some of his paintings are pure abstraction. [344] His calligraphic works lie somewhere between traditional ink paintings and calligraphy with distinct elements of "weirdness". These elements remind us of most artworks from the Yangzhou school in the 18th century, also known as the Eight Eccentrics from Yangzhou.

Wei Ligang. *Birds*, 2019, ink and acrylic colour on rice paper

[342] "China Today: Modern Chinese Calligraphy and Western Art." *Blog*, www.asianbrushpainter.com/blog/knowledgebase/the-avant-garde-movement-of-chinese-calligraphy-a-globalised-calligraphy/ , last retrieved 25 January 2020.

[343] "Wei Ligang魏立剛." *Ink Studio*, www.inkstudio.com.cn/artists/86-wei-ligang/overview/, last retrieved 25 January 2020.

[344] An interview with Wei Ligang, 10 November 2017, Wei Ligang's studio near Beijing.

Wei Ligang uses the impulsive gestures of expressionism in combination with Chinese tradition. The composition of Wei's paintings suggests a vigorous inspiration from calligraphy – his abstract lines are stacked in columns that remind us of traditional calligraphic work. Nevertheless, there is an apparent difference between his work and traditional calligraphy. His lines represent a series of lines without the typical calligraphic way of using the brush that we see in most Chinese artists mentioned here. Sometimes he uses a dry brush; sometimes his lines flow gently, full of water. Not all of Wei's works are abstract; in some of his works, small stylised faces can be seen at the top of the columns. In some of his works, the author pays homage to old technical manuals that teach calligraphy and divide each character into strikes. Other paintings are similar to those of Western artists who work with extensive areas of colour instead of calligraphic lines. Sometimes his palette is limited to signal colours reminiscent of Miró or Malevich, as is evident in his painting *Birds*. Sometimes he is inspired by a Chinese painting's composition complete with a cal-

Wei Ligang. *Ancient Squares*, 2008, ink and acrylic colours on printed rice paper

ligraphic inscription that is part of the work and becomes an organic part of it. In *Ancient Squares (95)* the artist uses rice paper covered by prints of the paper-making factory, which he has creatively incorporated into his painting.

The calligrapher and artist Wang Dongling王冬齡(b. 1945),[345] a director of Contemporary Calligraphy at the Research Centre of the China Academy of Art, Hangzhou, living and working in Hangzhou, is associated with the 1990s Experimental Ink and Wash movement, which elevated the form of gestural markings over the content. Wang pursues the performative concerns of traditional calligraphy, which emphasise the act of writing as an expression of the relationship between art and the body. He experiments with his use of the brush, and the movements of his fingertips, wrists, arms, and his entire body.[346] During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Wang's art was greatly influenced by the very different cultural environments he experienced in the United States and Japan. Therefore, his style became more international and open to foreign influences, such as inspiration from avant-garde calligraphy, especially the Japanese artist Yūichi Inoue. Nevertheless, his works are deeply rooted in tradition.

[345] In 1966 he graduated from the Fine Arts Department of Nanjing Normal University. In 1981, he obtained his MA degree in Fine Art from the Calligraphy Department of Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (nowadays China Academy of Art) in Hangzhou, where he is presently working as a professor at the Calligraphy Department. Wang Dongling has had several solo exhibitions, as *Guanshan Gathering: Works by Zheng Shengtian and Wang Dongling*, Chambers Fine Art, Beijing, and *Wang Dongling—The Origins of Abstraction*, Ink Studio, Beijing, in 2013, he presented his new works in Chambers Fine Art, New York in 2015. In 2016 it was *Wang Dongling: Writing Chaos*, Ink Studio, Beijing, in 2018, *Wang Dongling: Poetry and Painting*, Chambers Fine Art, New York and *Along the Great Path*《行於大道》*- A Solo Exhibition of Wang Dongling's Calligraphic Repertoire*, iPreciation, Singapore. He has participated in many collective exhibitions, and his works are in the collections of numerous museums, such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA, Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA. British Museum, London, UK, Asia Society New York, USA, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, USA, North Dakota Museum of Art, North Dakota, USA, National Art Museum of China, Beijing, China, The Palace Museum, Beijing, China, and many others.

[346] For more information see "Wang Dongling王冬齡." *88 Artworks, Bio & Shows on Artsy*, www.artsy.net/artist/wang-dongling-wang-dong-ling. Last retrieved 25 January 2020.

Wang Dongling. *Abundance*, 2011, ink on rice paper

Wang Dongling's dynamic brushwork seems to pour torrents over cliffs and is poised to upset beasts in the deep wild. He writes in the shadows of the modern skyscraper and imagines his calligraphy in the contemporary visual context. Therefore, his work echoes the achievements of monumental writing from the ancient masters. In some of his works, Wang Dongling experiments with using photography in his writing. Sometimes, he paints (or writes) on the surface of mirrors, or on stainless steel plate, such as his work *Yijing* and everything and everyone becomes part of the work. In other works, he enters the deep waters of Chinese tradition. In some of his works, there are visible brushstrokes of calligraphy but in a composition similar to abstraction. His calligraphy turns into illegible scribbles, without explicit meaning of the words. The lines become flat, reminiscent of European handwriting that varies little in thickness of the lines, or engravings on canes or bone, not yet possessing the typical calligraphic strokes that only came with the invention of *lishu*, clerical script. Other times, the lines change to abstract structures. In some of his experiments with photography, the combination with calligraphy works ideally; sometimes it is too direct. The most interesting are those where the images seem to disappear under the characters, only the vague scratched pieces of paper with a photo covered in lines remains.

Wang Dongling. *It is a Flower and it is not a Flower*, 2013, silver salt at photo paper

> Most of Wang Dongling's ink works can be considered contemporary calligraphy; some of them are calligraphic inscriptions with distinct traditional features. From the position of the art world, artists claim, contemporary Chinese calligraphy is not calligraphy; from the perspective of Chinese tradition, it is still calligraphy.[347]

Some of Wang Dongling's works cannot be considered as ink art in any strict sense, such as *It is a Flower and it is not a Flower* (96)[348], but it still bears the hallmarks of the cultural background connected with ink art. The name of his work in ink *It is Calligraphy and it is not Calligraphy* (97) plays on the form of (Bai Juyi's (Bo Juyi's) poem, and at the same time, it questions the borders of calligraphy. According to Wang's statements, the same artwork can be treated as contemporary abstract ink art in the context of Western perception and in the cultural context of Chinese tradition it can

[347] Xu Jiang許江, Shi Zhi食指. *Zai dongfang he xifang zhijian—Wang Dongling, hei bai zhi shang, /*在東方和西方之間--王冬齡，黑白至上*/Between East and West, Wang Dongling, the Ultimate Black and White*. Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2012.

[348] A poem by the Tang dynasty poet Bai Juyi.

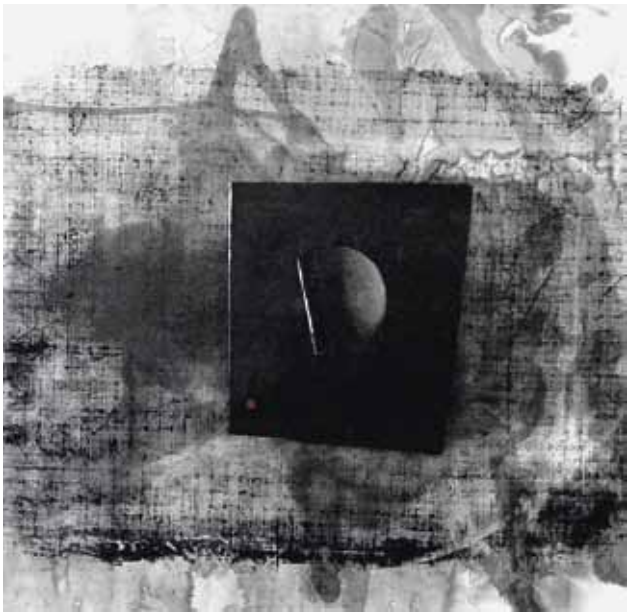
be considered as calligraphy.[349] In some works, the feeling of calligraphy is stronger; sometimes there are just wild brushstrokes, aware of the long history, but independent of the rules, of how to write, and free from any content. Therefore, there are some similarities between Wang Dongling and Wei Ligang, despite their apparent differences in artistic expression. Wang Dongling's artistic achievements represent the best of Chinese calligraphic tradition with visible abstract features, but only part of his work belongs to abstract ink art in the strictest sense.

Another artist who slowly achieved abstraction and continued with it for many years, is Hang Faji杭法基(b. 1945), a member of the China American Association, who is now an independent freelance artist. His studio is located in the Songzhuang Art District in Beijing.[350] So far, the ex-

Wang Dongling *It is Calligraphy and it is not Calligraphy*. 2015, ink

[349] From the WeChat communication with the artist, November 2019.

[350] From the 1980s to the 1990s, Hang Faji held 16 solo art exhibitions at the National Art Museum of China, the Jiangsu Art Museum, and the Phoenix Art Center in the United States. Some of his works have been exhibited in various art exhibitions at home and abroad. He has published „Hang Faji Abstract Ink Paintings". In 2000, he was selected in the fourth volume of *The Artistic Trend of Modern Chinese Ink and Wash in the Late 20th Century* edited by Zhang Yu. Therefore he had some limited contact with the movement of *Experimental Ink and Wash*. From 2012 to 2018, he held many exhibitions at Beijing Today Art Museum and Museum of Contemporary Art and Literature, Songzhuang.



Hang Faji. *Magic Square Series-Lunar Eclipse*, 1993, ink on paper

perimental phase of abstract ink painting has lasted for more than 30 years. In 2018, he had a solo exhibition *No Phase, Walking Alone: Hang Faji Art Document Exhibition*, in the Songzhuang Contemporary Art Archive. The curator of this exhibition was the contemporary art theorist Wu Hong.[351]

Hang Faji is one of the pioneers of contemporary ink painting, as well as one of the first artists in China to practise abstract ink painting. At the end of the 1970s, after China opened up to the world, many artists felt the breath of fresh air from Western modern art, but the chains of figurative thematic paintings could not be broken easily. They had not yet realised how to get out of the imprisonment of inherent thinking and patterns. Many artists continued to think about changing their style, but did not know how to

[351] For more details on this exhibition, see "Xianchang | wu xiang duxin: Hang Faji wenxian zhan, shuxie xiandai shuimo zhi wai de duli gongxian现场 ｜ 无相·独行：杭法基文献展，书写现代水墨之外的独立贡献[Scene | No Phase, Walking Alone: exhibition of Hang Faji´s artworks, writings, and his independent contributions beyond modern ink and wash]". *yishu guoji wang,* https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/CAix_woZbwKrExiL5AHUUg, last retrieved 25 January 2020.

start. However, through experiments with different materials, and rational thought, Hang Faji raised the abstract elements of the ready-made product to a level of pure abstraction of form.

Hang Faji was one of the first artists who started with abstract experimental ink in China. His ink-and-wash series "Modern Industry" uses hard-edged forms to intersect and overlap industrialised steel shapes, expressing his sense of rhythm and the intensity of conflict. It can be said that he is a pioneer of abstract ink painting.[352] A historical allusion, a philosophical proposition, a poem and a state of consciousness could all become an opportunity for one of his paintings, the driving force for his management of pictures and immersion into the world of images. Hang's works seem to be indecisive, adaptable, and diverse, but full of care, and people show their internal cultural qualities by the external form. It is a kind of *literati* painting in the form of abstract expression.[353]

Hang Faji calls his works abstract ink paintings; he even uses the expression *literati* paintings in combination with abstraction, which is quite uncommon in mainland China. He expressed his view of his art thus:

> I quickly returned to the initial ink painting creation, and used the advantages of abstract experimental factors realised in collage practice to break down the barrier of "abstract ink painting". I stayed with that for more than 30 years. I created various series of my contemporary abstract ink and wash works of multiple forms, such as "Magic Cube", "Ink Soul", "*Literati* Abstract Ink Paintings", and "Image of Calligraphy". They are interlaced continuously to create complex and varied forms. There is only one name for all of them: "Abstract Experimental Ink". It has been difficult and lonely for me to "walk alone" for decades. I have been doing all these new abstract ink and wash works for too long, and I feel that I can no longer surpass myself.[354]

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[352] Liu Feng劉峰. Dui xiandai shiyan shuimo de zai renshi對現代實驗水墨的再認識 [Recognition of Modern Experimental Ink], http://msb.zjol.com.cn/html/2011-07/09/content_948765.htm?div=-1, last retrieved 25 January 2020.

[353] Fan Di'an範迪安. "Introduction." 陳大娜 Chen Dana. *Hang Faji chouxiang shuimo hua ji*杭法基抽像水墨畫集*/Hang Faji's catalogue of Abstract ink Paintings*, Zhongguo Meishu Xueyuan chubanshe, Hangzhou, 2002.

[354] An interview between Hu Shaojie胡少杰and Hang Faji, which is going to be published in book form with the cooperation of the journal Man yishu. This book will present about 50 distinguished Chinese artists in the period of the last 40 years. The information was sent by the artist via WeChat, 5 January 2020.

Hang Faji. *Arch of the Limits*, 2017, ink on rice paper

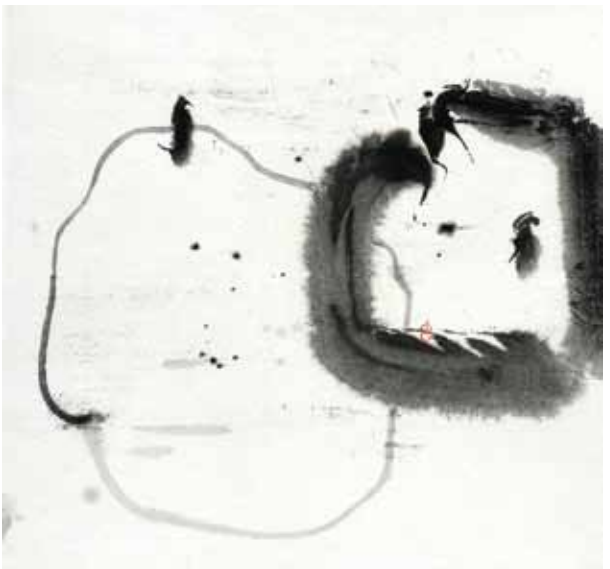
In his works, Hang Faji has moved naturally to abstraction, breaking free from the constraints of shape and context at the beginning of the 1980s. His works oscillate between explicitly calligraphic paintings and more rational structures. Some of his works are characterised by hard edges, others resemble architectonic elements or geometric lines, with no hint of calligraphy, as is visible in *Arch of the Limits*. He does oil paintings, installations and ready-made objects. Ink works represent only part of his abundant output.

The inspiration from calligraphy is remarkable in the work of Lan Chunlei 藍春雷 (b. 1971) who has been involved in abstract ink art for years. He compared the differences between oil painting and ink painting.

> Western art, which means oil painting as a technique, is for me, like strong alcohol, you can feel its strength as soon as you take it in; it affects you as if you are drunk. Chinese art on the other hand is as delicate as tea; it requires time and, while drinking, its subtle taste and smell distinguish it from water.[355]

[355] An interview with Lan Chunlei, 4 September 2019, 798 Art zone, Beijing. In 2012 Lan was an artist in residence at Shangyuan Art museum上苑藝術館, Beijing. Since 2012, he has participated in more than 20 exhibitions in different cities in China, like Beijing, Shenzhen, Suzhou, Shanghai, and many others.

Lan's inspiration for abstract painting came originally from calligraphy and ancient ink paintings made by *literati* painters. He started to write calligraphy in his childhood, influenced by Chinese philosophy, especially by meditative Chan Buddhism and Daoism. Although abstract, his works bear noticeable features of Chinese tradition. Han Faji's expression "*literati* abstract ink painting" would perfectly fit him, as it would other artists mentioned here. In Lan's works, elements of Chinese tradition meet with abstraction. Lan Chunlei's images are full of an intellectual atmosphere, peace as if immersed in quiet meditation. Reality does not exist, as if it disappeared while thinking about the meaning of human existence. His work resembles lyrical abstraction as we know it from French painting rather than the wild gestures of abstract expressionists. Lan Chunlei gives this view of his opinion to his work:



Lan Chunlei. *Habitat for the Soul*, 2010, ink on rice paper

I have been doing abstraction since the beginning. For studying traditional Chinese painting, although I had a lot of pictures, mainly landscapes, I think reading is essential. Reading a painting means listening to the heartbeat of the master, it is a heart-to-heart. In the process of expressing the feelings of my heart, I feel the humanistic qualities present in the picture, just as I read ancient calligraphic inscriptions on stone stelas when I was learning calligraphy. I have always been attached to Oriental thinking. Oriental thinking tends to be

> expressed in our minds, coming from the depths of the heart. Like Bada Shanren and Shitao they were in a period of dynastic alternation. Maybe their situation at that time was more uncomfortable than ours now. They chose it. Their metaphorical and inward personal emotional expressions are different from the direct expressions of the West, such as Dürer, Picasso, Kafka, and expressionism, pop art, and so on. I found my true self through painting and uncovered something deep in my soul. It was more the self-confidence of "according to virtue, benevolence, and entertainment." If the focus is on the market, it may be at the expense of art.[356]

During the communication, he compared ink art to a faint light in the darkness, enough to dimly illuminate the path of the mind, from the pure simplicity of ancient times to the current chaotic image, from the hustle of the external environment to the inner peace of the self. He expressed his techniques and methods of painting in the following words: 'The mind gives birth to various methods, and the mind destroys all methods. If it is described in the image, it is nothing but the reflection of the moon in a cold lake, a glimmer of light and a spirit.'[357]

Lan Chunlei's paintings are strongly anchored in tradition; Chinese traditions encompass abstraction in their works. The images of Lan Chunlei are full of an intellectual atmosphere, peace as immersion in quiet meditation. They present reality as non-existing, as if it has disappeared when contemplating the meaning of human existence. They resemble the lyrical abstractions of French painting more than the wild gestures of abstract expressionists. Lan is deeply inspired by tradition.

> Chan ruling wisdom, Daoism's cleanliness and acting by not acting, Confucian tranquillity and remoteness, the simplicity of the Book of Songs, the conciseness of the Records of the Historian, the purity of the *lishu*, the wildness of *kuangcao*, the faintness of Mu Qi, the calmness of Hong Yi, the loneliness and arrogance of the Eight eccentrics…. They are all inspiring to me.[358]

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[356] Shangyuan zhu guan yishujia fangtan zhi 9 – Xiao Yufang & Lan Chunlei上苑駐館藝術家訪談之9 – 肖毓方&藍春雷[Talks between the artists in Shangyuan art museum No. 9 – Xiao Yufang and Lan Chunlei, a discussion on 16 October 2012, in Xiao Yufang's studio] " *Blog.sina*, Published: 17 December 2012, blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4a30891401015fp7.html, last retrieved 25 January 2020.

[357] From a WeChat communication with the artist, 16 January 2020.

[358] From a WeChat's communication with the artist, 16 January 2020.

Lan Chunlei. *Hong Ren's Native Place*, 2008, ink on rice paper

Speaking about wild and unrestrained artists does not appeal just to the above-mentioned. Wildness is one of the essential features for many artists mentioned here, but has also been one of the fundamental characteristics of ink art during the centuries. Being wild and independent is almost the requirement for a good artist in any period, and not only in China. It can be debated whether Abstract calligraphy belongs to abstraction or not, and whether Wang Nanming's *Calligraphy Balls* are abstract art or calligraphy. Nevertheless, it is beyond dispute that calligraphy with abstract features is a part of avant-garde art, not only in Japan but also in mainland China.

V. 3. Chinese at heart – contemporary Chinese artists after '85 New Wave, living between China and abroad

Some artists are disconnected from cultural events in China mostly because of their nomadic life. Unlike earlier artists, the generation coming from '85 New Wave, such as Gu Wenda, Xu Bing, and Wang Chuan, who are still both active abroad and often take part in prominent exhibitions in mainland China, the position of the artists who left China before they established their reputation is more complicated. Artists mentioned here all reside partly in China. They have studios, and they participate in some exhibitions, but it is more difficult for them to find the right position in Chinese art circles. Sometimes it was more coincidence than age difference as to which artists were involved in the avant-garde movement in the 1980s. Artists who went abroad and gained a reputation there but had left before they established their career in China have a more problematic position in the Chinese cultural sphere, mostly because it is not so easy to define their position in the structures of Chinese society. Therefore, it takes them longer to start engaging in activities with the artists who did not leave China. When it comes to abstract art, these artists mostly take advantage of absorbing different cultures and maintain their distance from conservative voices in mainland China.

Artists residing abroad for part of their lives are much more open to experiments with ink. Surprisingly, they often use ink, although they sometimes use other media, such as oil painting and installations. Ink shows their cultural connection to their fatherland, and therefore they do not abandon it. Distance from home has enabled them to see more clearly certain aspects of Chinese tradition, which are harder to see for artists residing in China. The combination of the cultural impact from other countries and the ability to view their own traditions differently caused Chinese artists residing partly in other countries to be more likely to experiment with abstract art.

One of the artists living partly abroad is Zhang Dawo張大我 (also known as Dawo, b. 1943), who divides his time between Australia and China. As a young boy, he was heavily influenced by the Chinese cultural tradition, especially the earliest historical monuments, ancient bronzes and by thousand-year-old stone reliefs. For the first forty years of his life he practised traditional ink painting. In 1982 he started to write modern

Zhang Dawo. *Inspiration from the Ocean no. 2*, 2003, ink on rice paper

calligraphy, before turning to abstract painting. He calls his artistic style "*Dawo miaomo* 大我妙墨" (Dawo's wonderful ink), and he agrees that his abstract ink painting shows visible traces of the artistic tradition of the Far East. In 1994 he moved to Australia, maintaining a studio in Beijing and spending time there every year. His works are in numerous collections, for example the British Museum and in Rupert Murdoch's collection. He has organised many personal exhibitions and participated in numerous collective exhibitions in China, Australia, Paris, Hong Kong and other places, often connected with contemporary ink painting, such as *Ink No. 1.– Contemporary Ink Painting* in Shanghai, in 2011.[359]

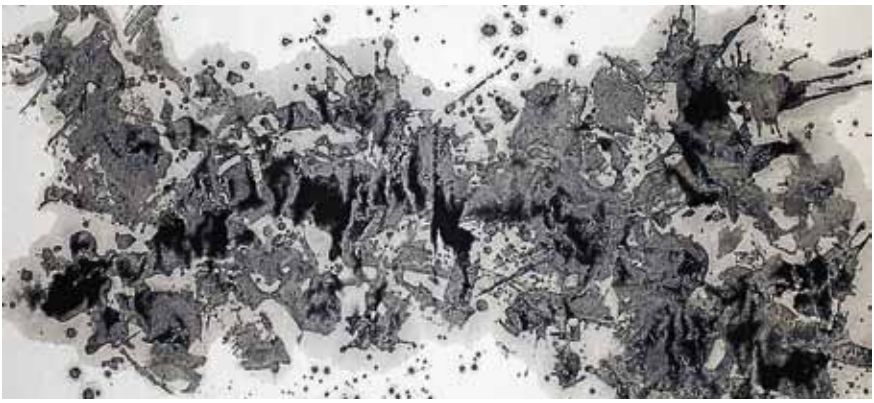
Dawo says about his works that although he has lived abroad for many years, they come from the Chinese tradition; his art has not opted for a relationship to Western art.[360] His abstract painting, influenced by Chan Buddhist and Daoist philosophy, especially by Zhuangzi, has naturally grown out of Chinese calligraphy, especially from the unrestrained lines of *kuangcao*. For Zhang Dawo abstraction means breaking the old rules that restricted Chinese calligraphy for thousands of years.

Zhang's ink paintings are full of bold emotion, expressive power; we feel the speed of the brush movement. His compositions often remind us

[359] "Ink No. 1.– Contemporary Ink Painting 水墨NO.1——當代水墨藝術展", *artlinkart*, http://www.artlinkart.com/cn/exhibition/overview/6b6buwtp/type/group/earlier/01, last retrieved 25 January 2020.

[360] Interview with Zhang Dawo, 17 November 2017, Beijing.

of ancient calligraphic inscriptions on steel or the composition of ink landscape paintings, but it is possible to find works where the lines take up all the space on the paper. For some of his works Zhang Dawo used a dry brush, frantically covering the paper in calligraphic lines. What he is writing is no longer calligraphy; it is just playing with ink. Some of his works are made with a brush full of water; his quick brushstrokes leave darker or lighter places on the paper.



Zhang Dawo. *The Birth of the Universe*, 2003, ink on rice paper

The works of Zhang Dawo directly relate to the insecurities and possibilities of new Chinese calligraphy. While his works are often completely illegible, it is clear from their titles as well as their technique that they are intended to engage with the calligraphic tradition. The explosion of the composition from the page, the essential illegibility of the work and the subtle ink tones and treatments assure the viewer that all is not as it once was. Zhang has also played with audience expectations by housing his compositions in (or around) a frame that invites the native Chinese reader to read the work as text.[361]

The accomplished abstract painter, calligrapher and poet Zhang Shuguang 張曙光 (also known as Paolo Zhang, b. 1967) spent almost twenty

[361] "China Today: Modern Chinese Calligraphy and Western Art." *Blog*, HYPERLINK "http://www.asianbrushpainter.com/blog/knowledgebase/the-avant-garde-movement-of-chinese-calligraphya-globalized-calligraphy/" *www.asianbrushpainter.com*/blog/knowledgebase/the-avant-garde-movement-of-chinese-calligraphya-globalized-calligraphy/, last retrieved 25 January 2020.

Zhang Shuguang *Speed Action Writing, No. 3-98*, 1998, ink on rice paper

years in Europe, and now resides mostly in China. He left China in 1993, after graduating in stage design, a specialisation of costume design at the Chinese Academy of Chinese Opera. After his arrival in Europe, he visited the most famous museums and art galleries in order to get a deeper understanding of both Western tradition and the most recent art movements. It was his experience of living in Europe that led him to devote his life to abstract art. In 2001 and 2005 he was studying in the Slovak studio in the *Cité Internationale des Arts*, Paris, where he spent the most of his time in the art museums and galleries, trying to find inspiration for future work.[362]

[362] In 2015, he completed his master's degree at the Faculty of Philosophy, Comenius University in Bratislava. He returned to China after 2015. In 2002-2003 and 2016-2017, he studied at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, at the department of oil painting and department of printmaking. During his stay abroad, he participated in

Zhang Shuguang's works are strongly influenced by Chinese calligraphy, and mostly devoted to oil painting. Most of his works clearly draw their inspiration from Chinese calligraphy. He has done abstract works, both oil painting and ink painting. In his words, ink is just another way to express himself. He feels comfortable when painting abstract works, and whatever material he uses, they all have their specifics and beauty. According to him, the feeling of being a disciple of the wonderful Chinese cultural heritage is not restricted to the media used by the artist, but is embedded deep in his heart. He is heavily influenced by Daoist and Buddhist philosophy, especially the Zhuangzi's philosophy of freedom.

> Abstract art, for me, is an emotional expression. It is my system of values and the search for my inner freedom. I believe that there is no fundamental difference between Eastern abstraction and Western abstraction. Abstract art is a universal value and artistic concept. It seeks to be the free expression of the artist's emotions, nature and thought, a perfect combination of reason and sensibility. Abstract art reflects the purest human splendour and the essence of art, a kind of human civilization and progress.[363]

The variety of Zhang's lines and the way he uses the brush reveal the skill of a calligrapher aware of the hundreds of years of history of traditional calligraphy, especially in its most unrestrained form—*kuangcao*. At times he plays with informal-looking textures that can be associated with contemporary movements of art as well as with the ancient Chinese wall paintings in their silent desolation, where lines of painting cross the lines of floating time.[364] Emotions, sometimes lyrical, sometimes strongly ex-

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more than fifty exhibitions in Slovakia, Czech Republic (Kromeriz, 1997), Germany (Frankfurt,1999, Munich 1999) Austria (Halbturn, 2001), Italy (Pallazo Braschi, Forli, 1999, Galleria L' Agostiana, Rome 2000, Cita di Castello, 2003) together with Slovak and Chinese artists, at the Shangshang international art museum's ten years celebration, January 2017 in Songzhuang. He has had more than twenty solo exhibitions in Europe and China, including Paris (2001, Cité Internationale des Arts), Presidential Palace, Bratislava, in 2009, Embassy of the Slovak Republic, Beijing (2003 and 2017). See further "Zhang Shuguang zhuye張曙光主頁[Zhang Shuguang homepage]", *Guojiyishujie*, http://www.gjart.cn/user/yend.asp?id=14789, last retrieved 28 January 2020.

363 An interview with Zhang Shuguang, 9 September 2019, 798 Artzone, Beijing.

364 Zhang Cziráková, Daniela. "Volanie čiar, šepot farieb [Calling the Lines, Whispering the Colours]." *Revue svetovej literatúry [Revue of World Literature]* . vol. XXXV, no. 2, 1999, pp. 103 – 104.

Zhang Shuguang. *Speed Action Writing, No. 7-98*, 1998, ink on rice paper

pressionistic, fill his works. The composition of his ink artwork reminds us of calligraphy or ancient Chinese Chan paintings, in which the emptiness becomes an important part of the image. Another source of his inspiration is Western graffiti. He was enchanted by its wildness, spontaneity and expressive power, and the way how the unruly lines contrast with the surface, the decaying walls of old, unrepaired buildings. During his travels in European cities, he photographed various inscriptions to study them and later incorporated them creatively into his works. In Europe he became aware of his Chinese roots, thousands of years of Chinese cultural history, and apart from oil and ink painting he started to write calligraphy. Calligraphic brushstrokes entered into his paintings. In Zhang's works, intense expression turns into lyrical harmony with the loud sounds of hard rock music, which inspired him to disappear into silence.

Zhang Shuguang. *Speed Action Writing, No. 5-95*, 1995, ink on rice paper

The position of Zhu Lan朱嵐(b. 1962) in the contemporary Chinese art scene is somewhat similar to the position of other artists mentioned. She is a professional painter, now living in Beijing and Canada.[365] Due to her

[365] In 1983 she obtained a Bachelor's degree in Chinese Painting from the Fine Arts Department of the People's Liberation Army Academy of Arts, 1988-1990 and graduated from the Graduate School of Art, Kyoto City, Japan, with a Master of Science degree in Wet Mural Painting. She has had more than thirty solo exhibitions and many collective exhibitions in Japan, Canada, France, China, and other countries. Zhu Lan's works are in the collections of art galleries and institutions such as the Centre d'art de Baie-Saint-Paul, Quebec, the Collection Lise Watier, Montreal, the Confederation Arts Center Charlottetown, CW Bank, Vienna, Banque de France, Paris, Aquilini Investment Group, Chinese Art Museum, Beijing, Art museum, Guangdong, Mingyuan Art Gallery, Shanghai, and many others. Solo exhibitions (selection): in 1989, Sensaibasi, Osaka;1995- 2001 solo exhibition in HAN Centre for contemporary art, Montreal, in 2007, Maison de la Culture Cote-des-Neiges, Montreal, in 2008 in Roseland Art Centre, Toronto, in 2013墨の墨

Zhu Lan. *Time*, 2016, ink on rice paper

residing mostly abroad, Zhu Lan did not participate in any exhibitions of the movement of Experimental Ink and Wash, and only in a small number of other exhibitions mentioned here.[366] Zhu Lan's works show complexity, clarity, and freedom above the chaos with rich and changing lines. The artist has developed her unique expression in the course of more than twenty years of abstract ink painting and thinking. In the words of the artist herself,

> Abstraction is the use of non-specific images to record clear but inexplicable concrete feelings. This seemingly unstandardised and undefined state Allows it to be observed according to different environments and different perceptions. Different angles and different conditions at the time can be shallow or deep, and the resonance can be light or heavy. Although the vision and the mind can be important to the work Although vision and mind may be important for work, only when they are integrated with work and experience can be shown in their depth.[367]

Black Black 798 Art Zone, Beijing, 2017 and 2019 in EGG Art Gallery, Beijing. For more information about Zhu Lan see "Jianjie簡介[Introduction]", *Egg Gallery*, http://www.eggartgallery.org/?page_id=18909, last retrieved 28 January 2020.

366 For example, Great Image is without Shape大象無形, an exhibition of Contemporary Chinese Abstract Art, Today Art Museum, Beijing, 2014.

367 Jia Fan賈凡. Zhu Lan: Yong bu juti de xingxiang jilu qingxi dan bu yan er yu de ganshou朱嵐：用不具體的形象記錄清晰但不言而喻的感受[Using indistinct images to record self-explanatory feelings]. 18 March 2018, *China.com*, http://m.china.com.cn/wm/doc_1_10_699478.html, last retrieved 28 January 2020.

Zhu Lan. *Roots*, 2017, ink on rice paper

Most of Zhu Lan's works are inks because it is the technique she learned and mastered first, but also because it is her connection with Chinese tradition. She uses ink on the paper with generosity and a feeling of freedom. She takes inspiration from Chinese culture but at the same time is not restricted by any specific technique or concept. Her style of composition is free and unrestrained, as she understands ancient ink painting. Her artworks are wild and unrestrained, sometimes using lines to evoke Western techniques by making use of a pencil or graphic nib instead of a soft Chinese brush. Despite only her ink paintings being represented here, the artist also employs other materials, sometimes using acrylic colours. Zhu was involved in the China Master Art Rug Project, for which she created her abstract art rugs. She expresses herself boldly through the elements of traditional ink, adding concepts from western abstract art, as well as from her knowledge of modern composition. As a result, her works take on a unique and personal appearance. She uses a full range of techniques; wet "flashy" lines and dots intertwine with the dry strokes of "bones", intervening with an element borrowed from Western art techniques, artfully incorporated into her works, creating a harmony full of living emotions.

Zhu Lan expresses thus her attitude to art: "I want to break with all the old things and look for new discoveries. I really enjoy this process

Zhu Lan. *Sweet Springs*, 2017, ink on rice paper

of change. This kind of experience that has always challenged me is also fascinating."[368] Zhu Lan's opinion of abstract art is:

> Abstraction is a road from obscurity to the light, which slowly becomes clear. To me, it is a state of being forced to change and develop naturally according to the changes of life in ancient Chinese philosophy. The irregular surface is like energy fields of different natures similar to the *I Ching* hexagrams, in transformation, change, dialogue with this world. Reality and imagination, space and aura, life and death, are beyond the influence of physical appearance. I am also in the process of searching for and being as faithful to feelings as possible.[369]

Hou Shanhu 候珊瑚 (b.1962, Beijing) is an artist taking inspiration from tradition. Since 1993 she has been living in the United States in New

[368] At the opening ceremony of He Art Museum. See further in "He meishuguan 'Kongjian xiaoshi, shijian zhongjie – Zhu Lan geren zhan' Jinri zai He Meishuguan kaimu 合美術館 | '空間消失，時間終結——朱嵐個展'今日在合美術館開幕 [He Art Museum 'Space disappears, time ends-Zhu Lan›s solo exhibition' opens today at He Art Museum]." *Sohu,* 18 May 2018, http://www.sohu.com/a/232125761_309195, last retrieved 22 January 2020.

[369] From an email communication with the artist, 10 January 2020.

Hou Shanhu. *Great Shape Series TY1903*, 2019, ink on paper

York and Orlando, Florida. In 2014 she returned to China, since when she has been living and working in Beijing as an independent artist.[370] Hou Shanhu's ink paintings are mostly unique due to their generous brush strokes. The inspiration coming from Chan Buddhism is evident in the names of her paintings. When the artist was asked to speak about her pos-

[370] In 1983, she graduated in oil painting from the PLA Art Academy, Fine Arts Department. She has had several solo exhibitions in mainland China and Taiwan, and participated in more than twenty collective exhibitions in mainland China, Taiwan, USA, Italy, Spain, and South Korea. Hou Shanhu's solo exhibitions include: 2013"Dynamic Origin" ─ HOU Shanhu Ink Works Exhibition, Taihe Art Gallery, Beijing, 2014 "Dynamic" ─ HOU Shanhu 2014 New Works Solo Exhibition, Taihe Art Gallery, Beijing, in 2017 "Dynamic"at 2017 ART FORMOSA, Songshan Cultural and Creative Park, Taipei, and the same year in Da Xiang Art Space, Taichung, Taiwan. Some of her collective exhibitions include: 2012 Miami International Art Fair 2012, Miami Florida, U.S.A; 2013 "5+5"Chinese-Spanish Women Artists Contemporary Works on Paper, Spain-China touring exhibition, Fundació Setba, Yong He Art Museum, Art Museum of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, Barcelona, Beijing,Guangzhou, Spain, China; in 2015, "Another Utopia – Shanghai Abstract Series Exhibition "Border", Ming Contemporary Art Museum, Shanghai, SHUIMO Meet Revolution, the New Silk Road, Beijing Minsheng Art Museum, Beijing, Ink Asia 2015, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center, Hong Kong; in 2016 and 2017, Ink Asia, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center, Hong Kong; in 2018, Boundary of Freedom(FIFTH ROUND), Casa dei Carraresi, Treviso Italy and 2018 Art Taipei, Taipei World Trade Center, Taipei, and others. Her works can be found iin the collections of The National Art Museum of China, National Museum of China and the Beijing Minsheng Art Museum.

sible inspiration by Chinese philosophy in her works, she responded by sending her pictures, the names of which included the word Chan. This answer was typical of her: as concise and straightforward as a Chan koan. Hou Shanhu's paintings are filled with an atmosphere of tranquillity. Despite the unbridled and generous strokes, a meditative atmosphere radiates from them. The composition is carefully elaborated, in addition to the black ink. Sometimes, the artist uses other colourful elements in places that enrich the simplicity of her paintings with a new dimension. She paints some of her work on yellow paper that evokes the traditional colours of unbleached silk, while sometimes the colours of rice paper are intentionally untouched to make them to make the white areas part of a perfectly thought-out composition. Her brush strokes appear spontaneous but the technique is visible by the amount of water in the brush, recalling the silent practice of a Chan master towards enlightenment. Words lose their meaning or, on the contrary, they acquire a quite different one. While Zhu Lan's works are unbridled, courageous self-expressions of the author, Hou Shanhu's art is quiet, meditative, and immersed in a rich inner world.

Paintings of artists who have spent more than ten years outside of China share some common features. They very often use ink, whereas for artists

Hou Shanhu. *Untitled*, 2010, ink on paper

living in China the feeling that using ink is necessary to being Chinese is less intense. Abstraction comes naturally to those living abroad and they often feel more Chinese than artists who have not left China. Some have realised they were part of Chinese tradition only after leaving the country. Those abroad feel less constrained by the conservativism of some mainland critics. On the other hand, they have a harder time finding their position in the Chinese art scene than the artists who did not leave the country.

V. 4. Latest tendencies in abstract ink painting, Neo-modernism and others

New artists still appear on the scene trying to find their place, to define themselves and their source of creation and inspiration. After the development of abstraction, a revival of figurative painting has taken place. New artists have brought figurative topics, stressing the style of painting by precise brushwork called *gongbi*. After being attracted by realism, other artists have started to question the limits of the expressive power of ink and abstract or semi-abstract painting. Gradually, abstract ink painting started to become more accepted and embraced; many exhibitions have featured abstract artists in recent years.

There have been several recent exhibitions showing abstract or semi-abstract art, such as the exhibition *Graffiti and Calligraphy – 6Abstraction China*, held in the Arario Gallery, Shanghai in 2017, [371] *Alternative Sign – 2018 Spring exhibition of abstract painting*.[372] In January 2019, Lu Hong

[371] "This exhibition featured six abstract artists in China on September 8, 2017." The exhibition presented six established Chinese artists, including Yu Youhan (余友涵, b.1943), Ma Kelu (馬可魯, b.1954), Qi Haiping (祁海平, b.1957), Tan Ping (譚平, b.1960), Huang Yuanqing (黃淵青, b.1963) and Chen Guangwu (陳光武, b.1967). See further at: Artlinkart. "Huang Yuanqing: Artist: ARTLINKART: Chinese Contemporary Art Database." *ARTLINKART*, www.artlinkart.com/en/artist/exh_tp/7f2btzp/db2ewwui. Last retrieved 25 November 2019.

[372] *Yi hao — 2018 Shanghai chouxiang huahui chunji zhan*異號 — *2018*上海抽象畫會春季展/ *Spearhead – New Abstract of Ink Painting*. Art museum of the Association for cultural and artistic communication between China and abroad, Shanghai, March 2018. For further information see: "Yi hao — 2018 Shanghai chouxiang huahui chunji zhan異號 — 2018上海抽象畫會春季展/ Spearhead – New Abstract of Ink Painting." Xinlang shoucang 新浪收藏, 9 Mar. 2018, collection.sina.com.cn/ddys/2018-03-09/doc-ifxpwyhw2028160.shtml?zw=collection.

organised *Spearhead – New Abstract Ink Painting* in the Ming Yuan Art Museum in Shanghai. Artists participating in the exhibition included artists mentioned here, such as Gu Wenda, Liang Quan, Liu Zijian, Liang Quan, Wang Chuan, Zhang Yu, Liu Zijian, Zhu Lan, Wei Ligang, Wei Qingji, and Yang Jinsong. [373] Not all new art groups are focused on ink art, but abstract art in China has started to attract more and more attention.

After Maximalism and Yi Pai, another emerging art movement is the movement of Neo-modernism launched in July 2018 by the art theorist Xia Kejun[374], a scholar with a strong philosophical background. He organised the first exhibition and published a Manifesto of Neo-modern ink art. According to him, this "neo-modern art" incorporates the linear light of abstraction, the extreme light of the cosmos, the light of the faith of Buddhism, the light of *qi* of Daoism, the first light of Western monotheism, and the virtual light of the age of technology. This pure language that fuses "light" and "qi" possesses the jade texture that forms from repeated diffusion of ink materials**,** a sense of breath like divine jade that gives rise to aura and spirit, simultaneously maintaining a bizarre tension within a slippery paradox and has the ability to comfort the fragmented souls of our era. This is a new imagination of meta-language or pure language. [375]

Neo-modernism comes from the philosophical background of Xia Kejun, but should be clearly distinguished from the Western philosophy of neo-modernism. China did not experience modernism and postmodernism in the same way as the West. All modernist movements, the whole of modern and postmodern art history, different styles and all movements came to China at the end of the 1970s, after China had opened its doors to the West. Therefore, the situation and perception of all contemporary art, literature and philosophy in China is different from the Western countries.

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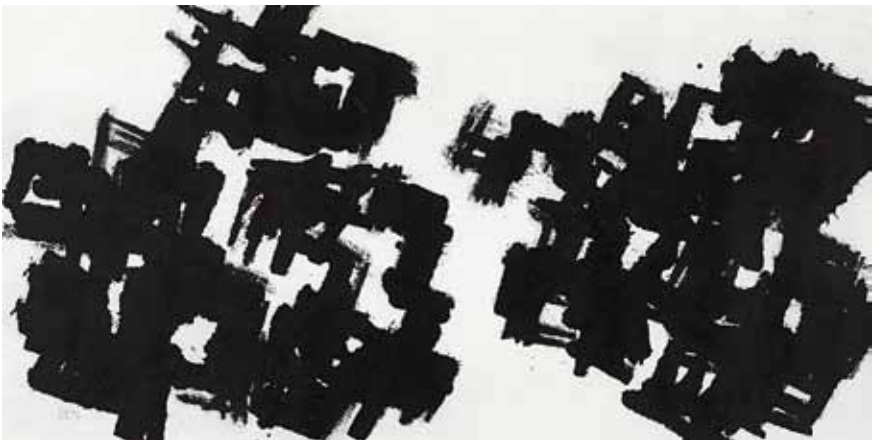
[373] The exhibition opened on January 12, 2019. Other artists, not represented here are Hong Yao洪耀(b. 1939, Sichuan), Qiu Deshu仇德樹 (b. 1948, Shanghai), Wang Jieyin 王劼音, and Zha Guojun查國鈞 (b. 1943, Shanghai). For further information see: Artlinkart. "Spearhead – New Abstract Of Ink Painting: Exhibition: ARTLINKART: Chinese Contemporary Art Database." *ARTLINKART*, www.artlinkart.com/en/exhibition/overview/580fuyom. Last retrieved 28 January 2020.

[374] The Neo-modernism mentioned here is an art movement established in mainland China in 2018. However, there is a difference between the Chinese art movement and the Western philosophical movement.

[375] Xia Kejun夏可君. *Xin xiandai shuimo yishu xuanyan*新現代水墨藝術宣言 */Manifesto of Neo-modern Ink Art.* G-Dot Art Space, Hong Kong, 2018, p. 23.



Sun Dahu. *Avant-garde Calligraphy 2015-3*, 2015, ink on paper

The upcoming generation of artists with some abstract or semi-abstract features in their artwork seem to be more rooted in the Chinese tradition, stressing the philosophical aspect of Chinese art, which always existed in the background. It can be caused by its connection with Xia Kejun, who claims that 'Ink art is at once an art form and philosophy, a path to changing our perceptions of life.'[376]

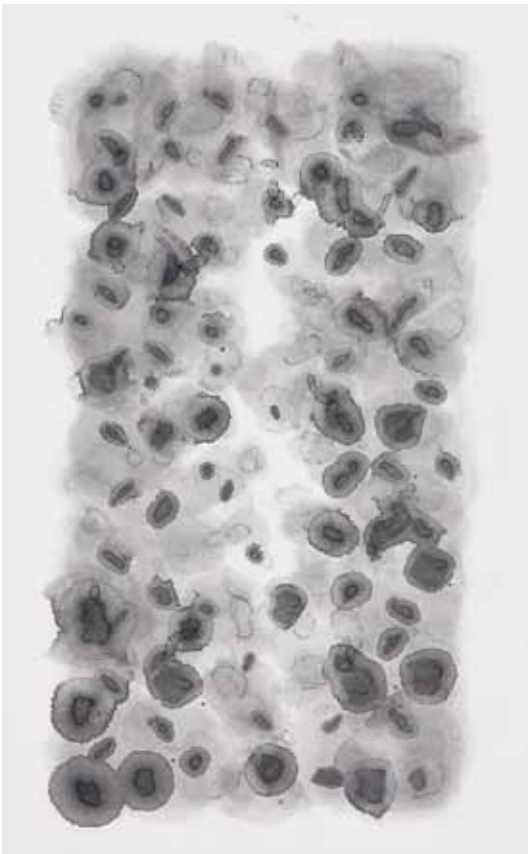
Neo-modernism includes abstract ink painting, but not all artists involved in the movement make abstract paintings. Some artists have been active on the art scene for longer, for example Sun Dahu, Lao He or Zhang Hao. The more recent artists, such as Chen Jiu, Wang Fei, Tian Wei, and Sang Huoyao cannot all be identified as pure abstract painters. The movement appeals to the philosophical roots of Chinese history, reminiscent of Buddhism, Daoism, or even Western spirituality, which can be understood in a slightly different way in East Asia and its perception may differ in our understanding, as happened with East Asian philosophies such as Chan Buddhism after they came to the West.

Aside from Zhang Hao, who has been mentioned earlier, one of the most remarkable artists of the movement is Sun Dahu孫大壺(b. 1962, Shanghai), other names Yimingdahu一明大壺, Dahu大壺, Hei Gui黑

[376] Xia Kejun夏可君. *Xin xiandai shuimo yishu xuanyan*新現代水墨藝術宣言 */Manifesto of Neo-modern Ink Art.* G-Dot Art Space, Hong Kong, 2018, p. 11.

Sun Dahu. *Avant-garde Calligraphy 2016-5*, 2016, ink on paper

鬼(black devil). The Chinese habit of (not only) artists using nicknames makes things more complicated, sometimes. His latest artist's name, Hei Gui, is the same as one of the artistic pseudonyms of Lao He (civil name Wu Guoquan). Among other similarities they have participated in some exhibitions together, and although Lao was mentioned earlier among the "wild and unrestrained" artists, Dahu would also fit into this category. The reason for including only one of them in this chapter is mostly due to their participation in exhibitions. They both live near Shanghai, which became a centre of abstract art. Their works have shown some similarities, too, both being typified by their calligraphic features. While Lao He's latest paintings use just one simple line, evoking the brush stroke made by a huge brush, Dahu's paintings are typically made by using several bold brushstrokes covering the whole paper. The brushstrokes are similar to the strokes of an axe; the impression created by his work is something unadorned and straightforward. Instead of speed in the movements of the brush, akin to flying, there is something like solid and controlled power — something of the honest work of a woodcarver or peasant working in the field. Dahu's composition is calm and symmetric, including the huge empty surfaces typical of Chinese calligraphy. As we can see in his *Avant-garde calligraphy 2016-5* and *Avant-garde calligraphy 2015-3*, more than crazy *kuangcao* it is reminiscent of the clerical script *lishu* in its simplicity, stressing its powerful solid lines. Despite a lack of speed, his works are



Chen Jiu. *Moji E Series, No. 5*, 2017, ink on paper

full of emotional energy. Like the drunken style of *kung-fu* fighting, which seems easy, but requires incredible skill and experience, his style seems to be inspired by the melody of the ancient Chinese zither or *guqin*.

Another artist residing in the same region, in Shanghai, is Chen Jiu陳九 (b. 1957) who was born in Shanghai. In 1987, he studied oil painting at the Shanghai Theatre Academy. He is the artistic director of the Zhu Qizhan Art Museum, and the Shanghai Duolun Museum of Modern Art.[377]

[377] He has had several solo exhibitions, and has participated in group exhibitions, mostly in mainland China, some in Hong Kong, and in Taiwan, for example in 2017 in the Taipei International Painting Exhibition, the National D. Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall, Taiwan; *The Polars—Part of the New ink Wash Painting Series Exhibition*, HKCEC, Hongkong, 2017; *Alien—2018 Shanghai Abstract Art Exhibition*, Ningbo Art Museum, Ningbo, 2018; *Ink Not Ink, Invitational Exhibition of Shanghai Contemporary Ink Painting*,

Chen Jiu tested the new possibilities brought by the continuous percolation of ink on rice paper. This subtle freedom and beauty brought him great spiritual comfort. He claimed affiliation to the Chinese *literati*. In the Chinese tradition, he was inspired by Daoism, especially by Laozi, and Zhuangzi. He found the idea of returning to modernity and retaining the traditional spirit to be compatible with his artistic goal. According to Chen Jiu, it is unrealistic to return to tradition altogether. The emphasis on materialism and commercialised society enables many people to change their view on the world and their lives. What is essential to him is discovering the possibility of tradition in the present modernity. According to Pi Daojian,

> Chen Jiu's paintings, with ink and water paintings, embody the "Twenty-Four Seasons" of Chinese ancients who respect nature, conform to the humility of nature and live in harmony with nature. It is the spirit of traditional oriental culture in the new cultural context. A poetic expression. Chen Jiu's paintings seem to be in the network-like symbolic system, with the contrast of ink and light, the flow of ink and ink, the flow of ink lines, and the superposition of changes, to construct or represent the water world in his heart.

Xia Kejun claims that 'The spiritual interest of "Mo Ji"(墨積) comes from Chen Jiu's decades of experience with pen and ink. It is a reflection of Gong Xian's ink method in the great classical tradition. He uses the brush to touch the rice paper through water-based contact, and continually writes and forms traces of ink.'[378]

Chen Jiu's abstract works naturally evolved from his landscape painting. In his older pictures, we can observe traces of the countryside which are gradually disappearing. The titles of the images refer to Chinese cultural tradition, such as the *Imprints of Water*. One of his works is called *Autumn Water*, another ink accumulation, both pointing to a number of traditions. Autumn water comes from Zhuangzi's philosophy; it is the name of

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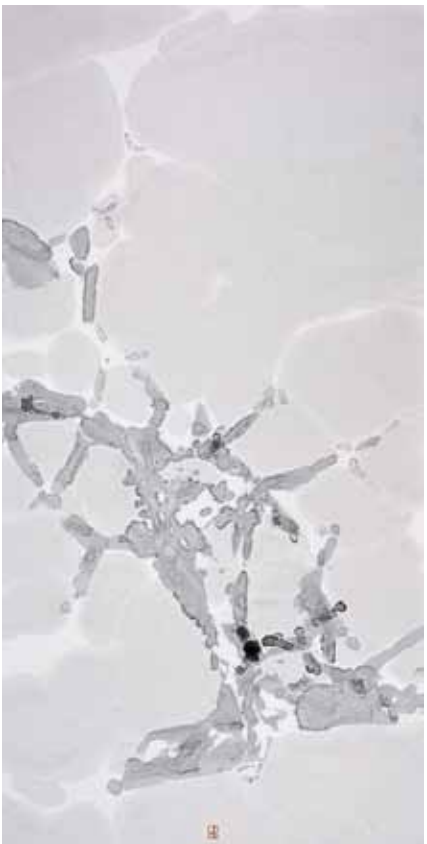
Guizhou Art Museum, 2018; *Manifesto of Neo-Modern Ink Art*, G- Dot Art Space, Beijing, 2018; Beyond Ink, Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai, 2018. See further in "Chen Jiu – Chinese New Art." *Chinesenewart*, www.chinesenewart.com/chinese-artists16/chenjiu.htm. Last retrieved 28 January 2020.

[378] Ku yishu庫藝術Kuart. "Neixiang. Chaoyue: Chen Jiu內向・超越： 陳九 CHEN JIU：Dui wo lai shuo, shui shi yi zhong ziran de jiushu對我來說，'水'是一種自然的救贖[For me, 'water' is a natural salvation]."*Weixin gongzhong pingtai*, 28 January 2019, mp.weixin.qq.com/s/5JkY1hiP3zS5QPyDRXayiw, last retrieved, 5 October 2019.



Chen Jiu. *Moji Series Winter, No. 3*, 2017, ink on paper

one of its chapters. The artist avoids clearly defined brushstrokes but uses instead the accumulation of ink spots with varying pigment, this practice of a using a brush reminds us of China's "boneless painting method", a method avoiding the outlines and visible brushstrokes. In its own way it meets the structural requirements of abstract art. The artist calls this technique "moji" 墨積, which can be translated as *ink accumulation*.

In terms of artistic language, he pays more attention to forming ink dots, surrounded by the ink accumulation effect. Chen Jiu carefully uses different techniques, methods of painting used mainly by *literati* in the Ming and Qing dynasties, strokes taught in the Mustard Garden. He uses the boneless method of calligraphy in the composition, seemingly missing brushstrokes, but each stroke is done with a brush. His works are created with several layers of, emphasizing vitality and vividness. He carefully uses ink dots, their accumulation made one by one, repainted again and again, like the brushstrokes used in the paintings of *literati*. Not all Chinese paintings were created by just a few generous brushstrokes, which are connected mostly with a traditional style of painting called *da xieyi*. His *Imprints of water* are organic and based on philosophical reflection.

On the other hand, Chen's paintings are much more a product of "research", a word that Chinese artists often use to describe their achievements rather than the result of a sudden emotional outburst, an expression of intense emotion. These paintings are deeply rooted in philosophical content, which is typical of most of the artists mentioned here. The composition

is often centre-oriented, sometimes enhanced by other compositional patterns. These are meditative works. It gives us the impression that by applying dots on highly absorbent *xuan* paper a state of enlightenment can be reached naturally.

The works of Sang Huoyao桑火堯 (b. 1963)[379] are filled with more abstract feelings. He has been experimenting with the superimposition of translucent colour blocks since the start of 1998. Many famous art critics in China have written reviews about his artworks. The scope of his experimentation has also won the admiration and appreciation of the internationally renowned scholar Michael Sullivan and the well-respected artist Wu Guanzhong.[380]

Sang's composition and conception of ink art are quite experimental. Being painted on transparent or semi-transparent panels facilitates his works minimalism, and brushstrokes are reduced to individual points, completely covering the semi-transparent material. Something in his style resembles Zhang Yu and his fingerprints, likewise

Chen Jiu. *Beginning of Winter*, 2018, ink on paper

[379] He has had several solo exhibitions, for example in 2014 and 2016 in the Renke Art Gallery, Hangzhou; Henglu Art Museum, Hangzhou, 2015; National Art Museum of China, Beijing, 2017; the Museum of Contemporary Art MoCa Singapore *Sang Huoyao – Jing Xiang Exhibition,* 2018 and many group exhibitions in China and abroad, e. g. at the Soka Art Center, Taipei in 2010; the Holland Contemporary Art Museum, Holland, Amsterdam, 2011; Venice, Italy, accompanying Venice Biennale in 2011, *A New Spirit in Ink* Shanghai New Ink Art Exhibition, Shanghai, in 2012; G-dot Art Space, Beijing, 2018, etc. For more information see "Sang Huoyao yishujia jieshao-Sang Huoyao guanfang wangzhan 桑火堯藝術家介紹–桑火堯官方網站". *Artron*, https://sanghuoyao.artron.net/about, last retrieved 28 January 2020.

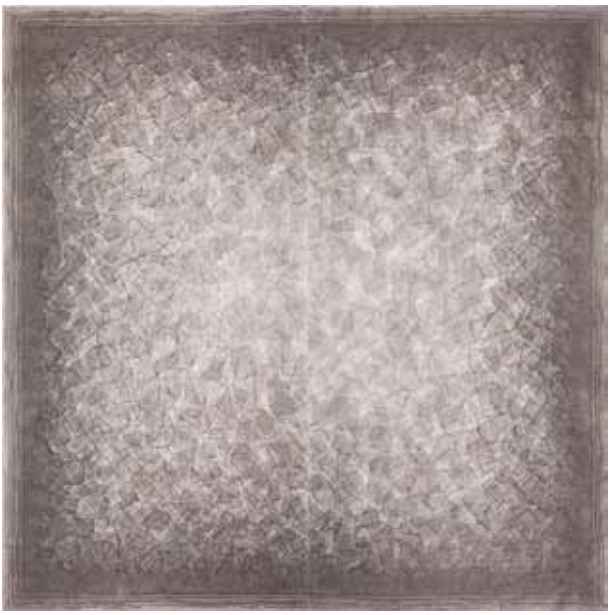
[380] "Sang Huoyao 桑火堯". *Artron*, https://sanghuoyao.artron.net/about, last retrieved 28 January 2020.

Sang Huoyao. *The Oriental Mystery*, 2009, mixed media on paper

playing with the light and the texture of the material. Zhang Yu is firmly anchored in the non-figurative world of abstraction; remnants of reality can be seen in some of Sang Huoyao's works. Therefore, it is uncertain what style the artist will choose in the future. The future will tell whether he will continue to free himself of the content and continue with abstract art, will turn to more realistic depictions, or will take a completely different path which is hard to imagine. Sang Huoyao's works have already contributed to Chinese abstract ink art.

Sang Huoyao has transformed the sublime and mournful colour field painting of Mark Rothko, making it a Chinese-style infra-thick prosaic beauty of rhythmic stacking, as we can see in his painting *The Immensity*. It possesses the essential traits of a rewriting of modern aesthetics in Chinese painting: the reception of decline and trauma, while also returning to the abyss, and retaining the clearness of natural colour tones and their tranquilly breathing growth.

The Minimalist paintings of Tian Wei 田衛 (b. 1973), who works and lives in Beijing are abstract, but from a technical point of view, they are on the borders of ink art. Tian Wei consciously uses atmosphere to create his



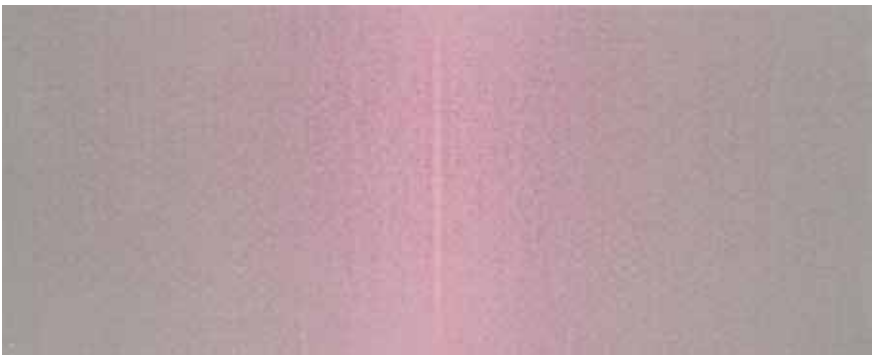
Sang Huoyao. *The Immensity*, 2017, mixed media on paper

paintings and follows the atmosphere where it leads him. As a painter who practises Tantric Buddhism, painting is, for Tian Wei, a practice of reading one's atmosphere. That is a writing of the mind unique to Chinese culture. In Tian Wei's works, that repeated writing adjusted by the breath and mind of Buddhism catalyses an inner spiritual aura. [381] It is like that hazy light of the beginning of the world, still ceaselessly trembling and silently diffusing.[382]

Tian Wei is trying to avoid the visible traces of brush on the paper. His paintings look monochrome, only with a slight change of intensity of ink in the middle of the paper. Chinese *xuan* paper is different from canvas; it is similar to memories keeping track of everything that happened in the brain. The uniqueness of ink painting is that it cannot be covered over and

[381] Xia Kejun夏可君. "Tian Wei's Genesis: the Aura of Mind and the Symmetry of Silencing." Xia Kejun夏可君. *Xin xiandai shuimo yishu xuanyan*新現代水墨藝術宣言 / *Manifesto of Neo-modern Ink Art*. G-Dot Art Space, Hong Kong, 2018, p. 119.

[382] Xia Kejun夏可君. Xin xiandai shuimo yishu xuanyan新現代水墨藝術宣言 /Manifesto of Neo-modern Ink Art. G-Dot Art Space, Hong Kong, 2018, p. 119.



Tian Wei. *1839-2018 One of the Plum Blossom Mountains*, 2018, ink, mineral colour, watercolour on rice paper

repainted easily like oil paintings. In the rush of life, people want to forget their painful memories, but these memories leave indelible marks without exception. As the artist claimed, ink leaves scars on the paper, and he is trying to disregard them just as Buddhists try to efface all suffering by escaping from all craving.[383]

Wang Fei王非(b. 1964)[384] graduated from the Fine Arts Department of Fuyang Teachers College in 1986.[385] To begin with, Wang Fei's was

[383] From WeChat conversation with the artist, November 2019.

[384] In 1992, he worked at the Institute of Chinese Buddhist Culture. In 1999, he founded the Art State magazine and was its editor-in-chief. He was the deputy dean of the Chinese New Ink Painting Institute and tutor for the Master's degree of Contemporary Art at Qinghua University. His works have been exhibited at the 3rd Beijing International Art Biennale, the China Contemporary Art Document Exhibition, the 2009 Critics' Nomination Exhibition, the Today China Art Exhibition, and the China Practice Ink Art Tour. In 2016, he participated in the 21st Los Angeles Art Fair on behalf of the "China National Exhibition.

[385] Some of his solo exhibitions: 2014.09 Spiritual light, Tian Wei Ink Painting Exhibition (Today Art Museum, Beijing), 2014.11 Spiritual light, Tian Wei Ink Painting Exhibition (Zhu Qizhan Art Museum, Shanghai) 2015.04 Cosmic Sprit, Spiritual light, Sang Huoyao & Tian Wei Double Solo Exhibition (Alioth Art Center, Shanghai), 2016.11 Hqinwu & Tianwei Double Solo Exhibition (Van Art Space, Hangzhou), 2016.11 Hqinwu & Tianwei Double Solo Exhibition (Van Art Space, Hangzhou), 2017.06 Between Motion and Stagnation, Tianwei solo Exhibition (Tokyo Gallery+BTAP, Beijing), he has participated in some group exhibitions, f. e.: 2014.08 Vacancy and Silence (Soka Art center, Taipei), 2016.08 Retrace of The World (Renke Art Gallery, Hangzhou), 2014.11 New Water Ink Research Series, Ethereal Dimness (Avant-garde Contemporary Art Center, Nanjing), 2017.12 The Polars-Part of the New ink wash painting series

searching alone in the black box that was the studio, in a world where black and white are turned upside down. For a number of years, he has been creating black and white ink art in the dark of night. "What gifts will the night give to an artist who has worked in the darkness for so long?", "How can ink art begin anew?" These are the basic questions Wang Fei has been exploring over the past few decades, and he has answered them in his latest works.[386]

Wang Fei. *Atypical Shape, No. 2*, 2018, ink on paper

Some of Wang Fei's works reveals the alienation and survival philosophy of humanity in the era of globalization with a unique language and cultural vision. Over the years, Wang Fei participated in the *literati* painting movement. He was trying to find and define his path in the field of ink painting, experimented with different styles and genres of painting, both traditional and modern, as well as flowers, birds, landscapes and figurative painting with a contemporary feeling. Since then his works have assumed their own typical features as he has combined ink with realistic painting, and some reminiscences of pop art. He started with abstract ink painting only a few years ago[387], but his works have retained its typical features – combining abstract art with subtle elements of pop culture and pop art. Not all of his works can be called entirely abstract; some of them bear the signs of pop art, such as the obvious quoting of labels (Nike) or electronic devices. The pop art features are evident in his

exhibition, Ink Asia 2017 theme exhibition planning programme (Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center, Hong Kong).

386 Xia Kejun夏可君. *Xin xiandai shuimo yishu xuanyan*新現代水墨藝術宣言 */Manifesto of Neo-modern Ink Art*. G-Dot Art Space, Hong Kong, 2018, p. 70.

387 Before 2006, Wang Fei did mostly figurative paintings; by 2017 he started to use some pop-art elements in his work. About 2018 he started do the abstract and semi-abstract works presented here.

Wang Fei. *Dark Hole*, 2019, ink on paper

Pig Era. Therefore, he is working on the edge of abstract art, but is still very inclined to abstraction.

From the artists presented here it is obvious that more recent abstract ink is turning back to its roots. The names artists are using for their paintings are connected to Chinese philosophy more than is usual. One should bear in mind that the movement promoted by Xia Kejun is solidly built on a philosophical basis. Therefore, the strong affiliation to philosophical topics can also be connected to Xia's philosophical background. His first subject of research was philosophy, and he only later started to devote himself to art criticism. Artists promoted in the movement mentioned here are exciting and promising, but as the movement started only recently, it is too

early to evaluate its achievements and its contribution to the development of the abstract art, or ink art as a whole. The movement of neo-modernism is still at its very beginnings; their achievements have not yet passed the test of time to prove the movement's vitality and endurance. Even if it is possible to speak about the qualities and artistic languages of the artists, it is still premature to evaluate the accomplishments of the movement as such.

These authors are only a part of the vivid artistic spectrum of the present time. The situation in the newly launched movement is still vague and unstable and therefore it is too soon to analyse it. There are also other artists not previously mentioned who have started to affiliate themselves to those in the art scene doing abstract ink art. Some of them have just entered the dangerous waters of abstract art. It is necessary to observe the situation for a few years to ascertain which artists have sufficient vitality, courage, inspiration or just the persistence to continue to pursue abstraction and who will naturally switch to other artistic styles.

Conclusion: Visions, hopes and challenges for abstract ink painting in China

The artists presented in this study have been Chinese nationals who are or have been involved in abstract ink art. It would be impossible to include all artists doing abstract ink paintings these days, and that is not the goal of the research. Rather than trying to cover all of them, I decided to focus on particular artists, and in analysing their works to follow the development of abstract ink art in mainland China as a process. The aim has been to identify its specific features and to observe abstract ink art within the timeframe of about thirty years, from its beginnings during the '85 New Wave, to the movement of Experimental Ink and Wash, Maximalism and Yi Pai, to the newest trends such as Neo-modernism.

What is more important than an accurate and exhaustive list of authors is the effort to show the process by which abstract painting used the medium of ink, and to explore questions about its perception and the difficulties and problems that the artists faced. Nevertheless, I believe I have managed to include most of the most prominent artists. After face-to-face meetings and interviews, the story became more complex and engaging. It showed the gradually changing position of abstract art in Chinese society. From the beginning of abstract art in mainland China, when the most common

Tian Wei. *1903-2019 Qixia Mountain, Part Two*, 2019, ink, mineral colour, watercolour on rice paper

Wei Qingji. *Occupation of Paramount Mountain 2*, 2013, ink and mixed material on rice paper

attitude was to consider abstraction as something exclusive to Western culture and artificially imported into China, many artists started to discover the roots and hidden sources of abstraction within Chinese culture. They became aware of the proto-abstract elements in traditional Chinese ink painting and calligraphy, which encouraged the emergence of more movements in the West involving abstract art. Although many Chinese artists have tended to deviate from abstract painting over time and change their style, these experiences enrich not only avant-garde art but also Chinese ink painting as a whole.

Abstract art in China has steadily established its position on the art scene. The research of this book has focused only on abstract ink, in order to determine if there is still a specific sense of ink in China as something that represents the essence of Chinese cultural heritage, as it used to be at the peak of the Movement of Experimental Ink and Wash. Most artists during that period claimed ink as crucial to their identity. They felt an association with the centuries of ancient tradition when using ink on rice paper.

It is almost impossible for Chinese artists to avoid traces of tradition, and this problem appears in Western art, too. It became apparent in the context of postmodernism, providing a continuity of cultural heritage and identity, but turned into a dogma, which made every movement and innovation difficult and painful. This is a significant problem in Chinese ink painting, which has been evident for hundreds of years. No matter what

solution the artists chose, the tradition has been far more restrictive than one can imagine.

The works of the artists presented here show clearly the process of the rise of abstract art in mainland China. After a long period of marginalisation and denunciation of everything related to abstraction, it has become increasingly more accepted for artists as well as for art critics to engage with the abstract. It is not important whether abstraction in China exists in its strict sense, or only subjectively. Whenever there are a significant number of artists (in)voluntarily creating abstract artworks, regularly claiming that they are involved in abstract art, this means that abstraction is present on the art scene.

Zhang Yu, *Bowls Installation*, October 2014, Shangyuan Gallery, Hangzhou

The interconnection between Chinese and Japanese calligraphy become clearer when regarding the artists and their works considered here. Though anticipated at the beginning of the research, albeit not to such a great extent in the case of the Japanese influence, this interconnection has been stronger than initially expected. A considerable amount of three-dimensional abstract artworks, such as installations, or even projects including ink but crossing over to other media was something beyond the author's expectations. The precise term for Ink and Wash is *shuimo* 水墨meaning water (and) ink. Therefore, some of Zhang Yu's bold experiments, such as soaking paper in water, can be considered as ink and wash only in its broad sense.

Wang Dongling. *Yijing*, 2016, painted stainless steel plate

> Art is liberated, on this view, from the need to understand itself philosophically, and when that moment has been reached, the agenda of modernism-under which art sought to achieve its own philosophy- was over. The task of definition belonged to philosophy-and art was thereby free to pursue whatever ends, and by whatever means, seemed important to artists or their patrons. From that point on there was no internal historical direction for art, and this is precisely what the condition of pluralism amounts to.[388]

The large number of various philosophical orientations that artists claim as their source of inspiration exceeded my initial expectations. In addition to Buddhism, Daoism and Yijing's hexagrams, there is, surprisingly, Confucianism. As anticipated, artists most frequently mention Zhuangzi (Lao He, Dawo, Zhang Shuguang, Chen Jiu), Chan Buddhism (e. g. Hou Shanhu), Tibetan Buddhism (Li Huasheng). What is also interesting is the inspiration drawn from Western philosophy such as Heidegger (Lao He), Western spirituality (Zhang Hao and his enthusiasm for the forms and spirit of Christian cathedrals and churches). Strong parallels between Daoism and Chan Buddhism can be found in Zhang Yu's works, although the artist

[388] Danto, Arthur, C. „The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense." *History and Theory*, vol. 37, no. 4, 1998, pp. 127–143, p. 134.

did not claim direct inspiration by either.[389] Zhang Yu's traces of fingers can be understood as Chan meditation, but in his works, we also find elements of existentialist philosophy. Neo-modernism is also closely connected with philosophy, perhaps due to the mindset of the artists, but also as the result of the strong philosophical background of Xia Kejun, who has promoted this movement. Therefore, these impacts need to be confirmed or further examined, as they are in an early stage of development.

Another unexpected result was the overlapping of ink art with Pop art (Wang Fei), and especially with Political pop in some of Wei Qingji's paintings. Chinese artists involved with ink art were usually considered as more conservative; although some of them applied some of the rules of political propaganda in the 1950s and during the cultural revolution, they mostly tried to avoid any political content. It is even possible to argue that the rise of all kinds of abstract art in China recently has been a way to escape from the political connotations of art, previously overused in political propaganda and later in Political pop.

Paradoxically, abstraction in official circles often encounters more obstacles than Political pop, which is sometimes perceived in the West as a dissident art, far from objective reality. Chinese society is so commercialised and pragmatic that it tends to appreciate artists when their works are high in the world rankings of contemporary art. Some artworks which in the eyes of Western collectors seem to bear slightly dissident overtones, are mostly tolerated in China. Artists doing Political pop are usually not dismissed; instead, the marginalised position concerns mostly abstract artists who do not receive recognition in official Chinese circles and consequently their works attract much less attention among Western collectors. Whereas the artworks of Political pop are sometimes so vague that official circles ignore them, abstraction is something that already caused concern: in the late 20th century abstract paintings were rejected at major national exhibitions.[390] However, the situation is gradually changing, and abstract or semi-abstract works from time to time appear at official Chinese exhibitions. According to Bonito Oliva,

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[389] See more in Zhang Cziráková, Daniela. „Beyond Ink and Wash, Beyond Abstract, Beyond Painting/Chaoyue Shuimo, Chaoyue Chouxiang, Chaoyue Huihua超越水墨、超越抽象、超越繪畫". Zhang Yu. *Art makes me Interview with Zhang Yu/Yishu Zuo ziji Zhang Yu Fangtanlu* 藝術做自己張羽訪談錄. Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2014, pp. 478-483.

[390] An interview with Li Xiangming. He was speaking about the position of abstract art in China, on October 6 2013, in the artist's studio in Hebei province.

Wang Fei. *Pig Era*, 2019, ink on paper

The idea that abstract art is imported into Chinese culture can be easily refuted by comparing abstract art to other art styles which exist in contemporary Chinese art without any question of "copying Western models", like Neo-expressionism or Pop Art, which is enormously popular in China.[391]

[391] "Weida de tianshang de chouxiang zhanlan yantaohui"偉大的天上的抽象 "展覽研討會.["La Grande Astrazione Celeste" Exhibition Seminar]" *YArt online Special edition of Abstract Art/Yishu zaixian, Chouxiang yishu zhuan kan*藝術在線抽象藝術專刊. zhuokearts/onlinemagiz/default.aspx, last retrieved 20 April 2019.

Gu Wenda and his artwork, artist´s studio in Shanghai, 8 September 2019

The rising number of artists has caused me to target exclusively painters who have been closely connected to the mainland. Attention has been given to those who continue to maintain ties with the Chinese environment, and spend part of their time in China. Therefore, some of the very representative Chinese artists living abroad, such as Zhao Wuji, Zhu De-

qun and Betty Ecke, are not mentioned here, and the same applies to artists affiliated to Taiwan or Hong Kong, whose works were presented only in passing, as a source of inspiration.

Chinese artists started to realise that their works are not only anchored in Western abstract art; many Western artists found inspiration in East Asian calligraphy, ink painting, and the expressivity and creativity of Chan paintings. It should not be forgotten that avant-garde calligraphers in Japan claimed the historical legacy of the famous Chinese calligrapher and theorist, Lady Wei. When interviewing Chinese oil-painters, some of them admitted that they would also like to try ink painting in the future. Perhaps the strict division of Chinese artists into ink and oil painters has been an unnecessary obstacle. In my opinion the Movement of Experimental Ink Painting has had the great merit of promoting abstraction in Chinese cultural awareness. Some artists believe that this movement is more or less history; for example, the artist and art theorist Zhang Yu commented on the subject:

> "Experimental ink painting became history, and today it should be called the ink expression of contemporary art. That means ink painting has to become part of modern art and it should begin communicating in the international artistic language. Otherwise, it is meaningless." [392]

Abstract art, even more than representational art, demands an actual encounter, the sensation of the thing itself. It depends on its effects, whether they are simple or complex, sensuous or conceptual, upon the presence of the viewer, who brings possibilities of meaning to its presentation of forms and colours, its visible patterns and rhythms, its forms, shapes and textures.[393]

As mentioned before, Western modernism is not a one-way street; after all, it is not possible to speak exclusively about Western modernism. Japanese Abstract calligraphy had a significant impact on the art scene in the 1950s-1960s to subsequently influence Chinese ink art and the Chinese calligraphy that inspired it.

Regarding the '85 New Wave generation, artists such as Xu Bing and Gu Wenda have still have not said their last word and continue to have

[392] Email communication with Zhang Yu, 19 April 2014.
[393] Gooding, Mel. *Abstract Art.* Tate, 2001, p. 11 (shortened).

Sang Huoyao. *Hope of the World 1508*, 2015, mixed media on paper

a significant impact on the Chinese art scene. Gu Wenda's view of abstraction is very different from that of artists living in China: he identifies works as abstract that other artists would call calligraphy.

The question of how abstract art will develop in mainland China remains unanswered. It is difficult to predict what might happen in the future. Given the promising upcoming generation, it is expected that abstraction will continue to grow. It is however equally possible that a reversion to descriptive realism or another unexpected direction may occur. It may be said that the fate of abstract art depends on the situation of the art market. China is a highly commercialised country, demanding commercial success, pressuring artists to evolve in a way that will guarantee a certain standard of living, or at the very least a means of survival. This may not apply to artists who have a secondary source of income and are therefore more independent.

The further development of abstract ink art also depends heavily on the situation in the country and on the future development of abstract art in oil painting. As far as abstraction is concerned, the position of hub of the avant-garde has been taken by Shanghai rather than by the more conservative Beijing, which as the capital city finds itself under more political pres-

sure. The aversion of more conservative critics to abstract art is somewhat understandable. The wariness of the establishment is harder to understand, especially given its tolerance of other genres such as Political pop, which enjoys more followers in China than abstract art. A rough outline of the political situation is the only requirement for an understanding of the background of the works presented. Therefore, the emphasis was placed on aesthetic criteria rather than the artists' lives.

Lao He. *Visualisation of the Struggle between Two Dark Substances*, 2019, ink and other media on hard paper

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